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## The Massachusetts Review *Summer 1961*

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**THE MASSACHUSETTS REVIEW**  
 University of Massachusetts, Amherst

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## Charles Tekeyan

### An Armenian is Now a King

HE LOOKED AT THE LETTER again. It had come days ago and every day he read it and then tossed it back on his desk. It was from a magazine in New York. The editor was asking him to write an article about himself and to answer at the same time a variety of questions. A small news item in a New York newspaper had been the cause of all this. And the letter continued: "During the last election you did something no one has ever done. There are always some write-in votes, usually in presidential primaries, but in the little New England town where you live, the two men running for mayor received—together—less than half the votes that somehow came to you—and you were not running for mayor or for anything else. Actually, we have only a few facts concerning those unusual returns and now we would like you to present us with the whole story. First of all, why did you decline to accept the mayoralty and let the man with the next highest votes take the job? We will make a payment of five thousand dollars upon receipt of your manuscript, and you have our assurance that there will be no alterations except for minor revisions. . . ."

He intended to ignore the letter but in the afternoon a telegram came informing him that if there were no word from him by the end of the week, a representative from the magazine would come from New York to interview him. He sat down at his desk and thought about it. He wanted the town to remain peaceful and beautiful. He did not want any publicity that would attract trouble-makers. Even newspapermen and other

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harmless promoters would ride roughshod over the community if it caught their attention, and the grace of its lack of affectation would disappear.

So now he decided to write a brief letter in reply, answering personal questions but actually revealing no secrets. He aimed to put an end to the curiosity that was becoming a threat. To keep those people in New York from prying into the affairs of the town and from turning it into copy for the pages of their publication—this would be his main task.

He put a sheet of paper into the old typewriter beside his desk and typed the names of the editor and the magazine. Then he started. "Dear Sir: I feel flattered by your interest in me. The election in this town to which you refer was not a matter of any political significance. The people here merely happen to like me very much. During the voting they were carried away by sentiment. To me this was both embarrassing and heartening. This year election day happened to fall on my birthday and I suppose the people considered it a propitious time to show their affection. I am seventy years old and the only lawyer in town for the past twenty years. What else can I tell you? I have never read your magazine. I'm still not finished with Plato. I do not even read the newspapers any more. They bring out the same news day after day and (a little too indifferently) show the world what an unregenerated fool it is. I also do not smoke, being tired of seeing so many people who cannot breathe unless they are smoking. But I must say that cigars look better than cigarettes. Cigarettes seem so inadequate . . . so pale and undeveloped. Before I end this letter, let me state that I appreciate your offer of so much money for an article about myself, but as you see, there is very little I could put into it besides what I have already told you. You say the article would be read from coast to coast and I'd be famous. But I am afraid fame is like beauty—only skin deep. Underneath every man knows he is no different from any other man and is a stranger even to himself. Yours truly, John Goroun."

In New York the editor showed the letter to his assistants

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and they all laughed, agreeing that Mr. Goroun was an eccentric but perhaps not a bore. They told one another that if he could be persuaded to turn out a piece, it would probably have many ridiculous digressions but would be more lively than the work of most amateurs.

A few days later, to his dismay, John Goroun received another letter from New York. The editor mildly scolded him for being so reticent and even hinted that perhaps Mr. Goroun had been selfish in refusing to serve as mayor when the voters had clearly shown that they preferred him to the regular candidates. Of course the letter finished with compliments. But there was also a line suggesting that the magazine would be satisfied with a simple composition explaining Mr. Goroun's popularity in town and his reasons for rejecting an opportunity that had come to him as it had to few men.

John Goroun got angry. He sat right down at his desk and wrote a letter in which he said he had no intention of writing compositions of any kind. "Elections come and go," he wrote, "but no one helps people move away from the slums of the soul—from apathy, hostility, ignobility. Public office, I'm sorry to say, often attracts helpless men who only want to help themselves. You suggest in your letter that possibly I feel I will lose my freedom by going into politics. Maybe I do feel that way. When an office-holder serves the people, he's free. But most of the time he tries to keep them in control and ends up being controlled himself. I'm not an important man but in this great country I can still live like a king. . . ."

When he mailed the letter he hoped that this would close the matter. He regretted some of the harshness in the letter but he felt it was the only way he could put an end to the loss of privacy that would have been inevitable—not for him but for his beloved town. In a few days, however, there was a registered letter from the editor of the magazine once again. It contained some harshness too and actually warned Mr. Goroun that if he did not wish to contribute a piece on the minor phenomenon that took place on election day in his town, then the magazine would do a spread on the town itself, sending several

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members of its staff out there in order to unravel the mystery that Mr. Goroun was obviously concealing. They would remain in town until they gathered the material they needed—by taking innumerable pictures and speaking to an assortment of townspeople. Appalled, Mr. Goroun quickly turned toward the typewriter and went to work. He had no other choice. It would be the lesser evil. He'd have to release secrets of several kinds, but perhaps he could save the town from being ogled like a circus and displayed in a magazine as though it were something freakish and sensational. All right, he would tell everything and never hesitate to worry about the reactions of those who'd be reading it.

Without premeditation he thought of the title and typed it: *An Armenian is Now a King*. Then he laughed. Quickly, he started to write:

When I say I live like a king it is not just a figure of speech. In my town I *am* king and every inch of it is my kingdom. I could have been mayor perhaps, but it wouldn't have been right. Would Queen Elizabeth take a political post in the government of her country? My situation here is very much the same. But I wish to make this clear at once: the people of this town are not my subjects. That is because I am a new kind of king—absolutely democratic. *I* am a subject of the people... their obedient subject, as Shakespeare used to say. Supreme... but not in power. A ruler who sits not on a throne but on the solid rock of brotherhood.

Here in this town *everyone* is the personification of the heroic image. Fierce dedication is not looked upon with suspicion. Strong feeling is not considered an aberration. We have faith in the energy of aspiration. People everywhere have the stature for heroism in their workaday lives but they need a little *lift* in order to give it shape. In this town a lift like that is in the air itself. But if anyone gets snobbish about it, we give his behind a swift kick.

How long have I been king? Since the Great Depression. Before that, I was a prince. My guardian used to tell me I

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was. Everyday since I was seven he'd tell me I was a prince and I believed him because my life was so rich with happiness and sorrow, only a prince could have owned such a life.

I was born in Armenia. Where is it? I don't know—a million miles from here, at least. Just before the turn of the century, I came to this country with my guardian. We were going to California but ran out of money. (This should happen to more people.) So we stayed in this town and he got a job in the furniture factory. He had been the mayor of our town in Armenia . . . therefore he was qualified to work over a machine smoothing chair legs. This town had only a couple of thousand people in those days and their king was progress. Nothing here reminded us of Armenia. A land of wistful beauty—that was Armenia. Even the soil seemed to be rich with the wisdom of the ages. And the air in Armenia . . . it was actually delicious . . . like vintage wine. And all around, people didn't listen to birds as much as the birds listened to the people. And hardly any Armenian listened to any other Armenian, and it was noisy and nice.

In America we discovered peace even though we listened constantly to the roar of ambition rising everywhere. Everything was new to us and maybe to everyone else. The cities, the towns—all of them virginal, and even the simplest man could notice with pleasure the mating of innocence with progress.

I've always had confidence but the year I was seven I lost some of it. Without warning and with the speed of bullets I became an orphan. My family was dead along with a thousand other Armenians. The town where we lived became a monstrous grave. We were the victims of a horrible disease—the savagery of the Turks. Nobody had found a cure for it and frequently there were outbreaks . . . and often epidemics such as the one that overtook my parents. My father's eyes—I still remember them. They were open. I looked into them but he couldn't see me. My mother was near. I put my head on her shoulder but she wouldn't hold me and comfort me. I began to feel a burning hatred for death. I was sure it was a Turk and had to be destroyed before it caught me too. But there were so many

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Turks. Everybody was outnumbered by them. And by death. So I ran . . . and then I ran back . . . back to my family.

“Gorounic,” some one called.

I wouldn’t turn around. Without my father and mother alive I was nameless. . . . I did not exist. A big man with a small white beard came over to me. He was Baron Vartan. I did not know his last name. All I knew was that he was the mayor of the town and our closest neighbor.

“Let’s go away from here, Gorounic,” he said.

I couldn’t move. He lifted me and carried me out of the house—out of the lives of those who were no longer alive but still so much a part of me.

“I’m dead,” I said.

“You’re alive, my son,” he said.

“I don’t want to live.”

“Your name is Gorounic. It means *little lion*. Lions are strong. Live up to your name.”

“My father was looking at me without seeing me,” I told him.

“He sees you,” Baron Vartan said. “He sees you now with your own eyes.”

“My mother wouldn’t hold me.”

“Her arms will always be around you from now on. Can’t you feel them?”

“Yes, a little.”

Baron Vartan had lost his family too and he walked as if each step would be his last, swaying and stumbling. In a while we realized we were the only survivors in that part of town. I waited for the Turks to return and get us.

Baron Vartan sank to his knees and placed a handkerchief over his face. Then he cried without pause. After that I was able to cry too. When he was finished he looked stronger. But I felt weaker.

“Your name should be Gorounic,” I told him. “You cried so loudly you sounded like a lion roaring.”

“I wasn’t crying,” he told me. “I was simply pouring out my hatred for the Turks. Anyway, *Goroun* would be a more

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suitable name for me because it means a *big lion*."

"Someday I'll be a big lion and I'll eat up all the terrible Turks."

"They don't deserve to be eaten by you, my son. Someday the earth will open up and swallow them and no one will ever know they existed."

"And no one will ever die again," I said.

I was cold, so Baron Vartan took off his jacket and put it on me. It became as big as a coat. We smiled and I felt stronger.

"Your father was like a son to me. Will you be my son too?" Baron Vartan asked.

"I don't know."

"I am leaving and going far away. This land is Armenia and always will be, but the Turks have made it the pit of a volcano. Will you come with me, my son?"

I took his hand and we headed for the sea. Thank God for water of that size! People turn land into hell, so an ocean becomes heaven. "How is it that they didn't kill me too?" I asked.

"Because you are a prince."

"I am?"

"Every Armenian child is. The blood of our kings flows through all Armenians. And all of them have hearts like The King of Kings. But God spared you today because you are a prince who will do great things. You'll be the *Prince of Passion* and your passion will be to bring back the happiness that was torn away from your people. . . ."

Within a year we were in America. I was afraid to go out and play or to go to school. I thought the Turks would find me. Baron Vartan let me sit on his knees as he sat sipping coffee. His nose was long and it dipped into the coffee when he took a sip.

"Why do you worry?" he asked. "In America only big people do that."

"Baron Vartan, I don't want to die."

"You will live a hundred years!"

"But I'm an Armenian. Death is after me. God doesn't want the Armenians to live."

"You are wrong, little one. God is a great general. He has

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many armies and the Armenians were one of his first. But he has so much on his mind he makes mistakes sometimes. He forgot to give his Armenian army enough weapons. It's as simple as that. But even when an Armenian isn't armed he can be a hero . . . just by fighting despair and disillusionment. Everyone loves the Armenians . . . don't you know that?"

"Everyone? Are you sure, Baron Vartan?"

"Each and every person in America loves the Armenians."

I went to school the next day happier than I'd ever been. I looked at everyone and knew I was loved by everyone. I asked my teacher and she smiled and said, "Yes, John Goroun, everyone loves the Armenians." Years later, when she was very old, I met her and she confessed she had never heard of the Armenians. She wasn't educated but she was very wise.

I wanted to go to college and become a lawyer. I told Baron Vartan someday I'd be mayor of this town just as he had been the mayor of his town. "Be a king!" he said. "Anyone can be mayor. A king is greater and cleaner. Also the job is permanent."

During my college years I became a milkman. I'd get up at four in the morning and start my deliveries by five. At ten o'clock I'd be in class . . . more awake than the other boys who'd still be yawning. I loved it . . . delivering milk to all those families. I'd listen as I left the bottles at their doorsteps and hear them snoring or waking up. Often they invited me in for coffee . . . and very often there would be notes in the bottles . . . from friends asking me to come over after school. I wasn't just a milkman when I came to those houses . . . I was a part of the family. By the time I reached class in the mornings, I had usually drunk a dozen cups of coffee in a dozen different places . . . and always made to feel at home.

After graduating I was married. Did I marry an Armenian? Of course. My wife is completely Armenian. But when I married her she was Swedish. In this town the people are *all* Armenian. I say that because Armenian is no longer just a nationality. It's a way of life, a quality of outlook, the spirit of one's love for life and man. It's easy to love mankind. Mankind

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makes no demands on you or me and does not really enter our daily lives. Loving people *one by one* . . . that's hard . . . but that is what Armenians do.

During the depression I lost my house. A bank hundreds of miles away had a mortgage on it and after the foreclosure my wife and I and our nine children were homeless. The furniture factory was closed down permanently, so the people of the town fixed it up and turned it into a home for me and my family. It was truly a palace. I cook a little, so I made the showroom in front of the factory a restaurant. My wife was a real help. The food we prepared was both Armenian and Swedish. Shish-kebab served smorgasbord style. Lots of people ate without paying and that was all right . . . those were desolate days . . . but the restaurant still made a profit. Even though I was the only lawyer in town, there was very little for me to do. We have no crime here, no divorce, and no one's sued anyone since I've been here. Drawing up wills and presiding over real-estate transactions—that's been just about the extent of my practice. The courthouse is so quiet we made it the library.

But through the years I've kept myself busy in several ways. I do a lot of tinkering. For twenty-five years I've sent one plan or another to the patent office down in Washington. Also, I moved the restaurant to another part of town and my eldest son is running it now. The factory is open again and it has three new wings. I bought it and modernized it in order to manufacture prefabricated houses. . . . My second eldest son—who is not quite as lazy as the other one—is running it and one of his jobs is to find out who needs a home and honestly can't afford one. We ship at least one free house a week to any needy resident of the United States of Armenia. My country.

More than half the people in this town are working for the factory now, directly or indirectly, and every one of them is also working for a single goal. We used to have a small college, the one I attended. Long ago it was torn down because it was falling apart and we had no money with which to save it. Now the nearest college is a couple of hundred miles away. I must admit I don't have much faith in our schools of higher learn-

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ing. They seem to be fostering too many mindless crammers. I believe I got more of an education on my own hoof than in any formal way. But I suppose everyone isn't like that. Therefore, we are on the verge of erecting a fine little university here . . . and we will try to turn out what one might call imaginative cavaliers.

Everyone over twenty-one has agreed to contribute twenty percent of his income—a double-tithe—to the fund. I am giving all of the profits from the factory. The builders have started and with the half million dollars I gave a few months ago, the main building should be completed in time to receive the first students in the fall. Eventually there will be three thousand attending. It will be named the Free University of Armenia. Where did the half million come from? I was lucky. The government bought one of my inventions. That's how I got the money . . . although for some reason my conscience is bothering me . . . because my invention will be used as an essential part of a new weapon. All those years of sending plans to Washington, I wanted to create something that would bring peace. But what invention has ever done that? At any rate, my bank account is empty now but I'm still a rich man. I have my people . . . these *golden* people. And I have a vision. A person can be considered educated only when he knows that humanity means *one big family—Armenian, of course*. A family must stick together. That's why co-operation is as important as competition. I say I have a vision, a mad Armenian one: In this town there will be cultivated people and labor and leisure—creative leisure and art and of course civilized behavior and meaningful adventure, and, maybe perhaps, the people will even be happy enough to please their Armenian King. The End.

When the editor in New York finished reading the article, he was perplexed. He told three of his assistants to read it. Later they came into his office for a conference and he asked them their opinions.

"The man must be cracked," the first assistant said. "He gave away all of his money and he says he's a king and used

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to be a prince. We'll be the laughing-stock of the country if we print it."

"Maybe he's kidding," the second assistant said. "The piece looks like a satire on do-gooders. I don't even believe he's an Armenian."

"He's a Communist," the third assistant said. "He's got the whole town in the palm of his evil hand. Everybody is working for him and forking over a chunk of each week's pay-check. There's something phony about that university fund."

When no one else had anything further to say, the editor got up and paced the floor. His three assistants looked at him keenly. They were obviously anxious to see what he would say. He looked sad and for the first time in his long career with the big popular magazines he was having difficulty making a decision. "We're dropping the whole project," he said suddenly—but quietly. "It's not for these times. No matter if the man is legitimate or lunatic. We're sure the town voted for him, but even if we can prove that this man and this town are a reality, we'll be in trouble. At best, everyone will say the magazine is getting sentimental."

## *Edmund Skellings*

### THE HARTFORD CIRCUS FIRE

#### *Toward the construction of mystery:*

Al, The Phoenix, who each matinee  
Lunched on coal and kerosene would say  
This should have been his tale to tell. He'd bitch  
If he grew hoarse and someone did his pitch.  
Al never tumbled to the gift he lacked  
And tried to tell the truth about his act,  
As if the real were wonderful. The fact  
Got him a small house. Then, burnt, he burned.  
Confusion was a truth he never learned.  
The last time that I looked, for once, his eyes  
Were bigger than his stomach. Al went wise.  
  
If you'd be barker for yourself, begin  
Most carefully at pitching your "come in!"  
For some will call all circuses a sin.

#### *Toward the construction of entertainment:*

Small seats. Oh how we packed them in.  
Not since Obadiah and Old Bet  
Have towners crowded to the till to get  
Their folded spieled away. Hearts lost within,  
All else was given freely, for the lights  
That glittered in their minds from sequined tights  
Spun sweets on which imagination fed.  
The eye was almost piped from the head.

Small seats. While each one counted elephants,  
We counted cash, and sunned our skins with dreams;  
In floral winter quarters, warmer schemes  
To round out a rich season with the tents.  
We had a fine blue sky that no cloud crossed.

We glowed in our desires. We were all lost.

*Clown White:*

The tumblers had gone off, when smoke  
Rose, and a cloud  
Of laughter  
Rose immediately after.  
An old joke touching a young crowd:  
A flimsy house, a loud alarm, a shriek.  
None of the clumsy volunteers could speak.  
Hysterically falsetto, one throat screamed  
Oh save my child!  
The red truck rang its bell and then went wild.  
On rubber feet, with giant toes,  
And gripping tightly his prop hose  
Stood spotlighted and fixed a man  
Who was a clown, whose features ran.

*Cage:*

Behind the booted man who claimed  
There was no beast he hadn't tamed  
A yellow mane of fire roared.  
He spun, thrust to those jaws the scored  
Rungs of a painted stool  
That kept a hundred cats in school  
Then like a fool  
Forgot his rule  
And ran, but Oh the sawdust floor was slick  
And Oh that licking cat was quick.  
He fell. And the stiff whip  
Went limp and melted in his grip.  
Down fell the planks. The flames flew up.  
All at once his blanks blew up.

*Rope Walker:*

Above the crowd,

As usual, proud,  
Alone, aloof,  
He'd brought his courage to the roof.  
But now upon the wire and bar  
An animal in fear he stood,  
Devouring fire in his wood  
And at his feet a pit of tar.

His act? To somersault through air  
Once twice thrice and burst  
Through a red paper square.  
Oh Jack be nimble, Jack be quick,  
Your thin air grows dark and thick.  
He took one last impure breath,  
Balancing how a flier dies.  
Then he left the bar, and then  
Once  
twice  
thrice.

*Side Show:*

Anger, the old tattoo,  
Flooded his heart,  
Rivered his veins,  
And rivaled all the blue man's art.

Courage, the old measure,  
Knew its pleasure,  
Dwarfed the tall man, tripped him up.

Fear, the black barbell,  
Fell. In that thunder  
The strong man weakened and went under.

Then Fate, the lucky hick,  
Swept the arcade:  
Knocked down bottles, rang the bell,  
Guessed each man's weight, and the right shell,  
Saw through the skin show, did so well

He won all prizes. Quick,  
He took his pick.

*Toward the destruction of elegy:*

Small stones. As if the measurement of death  
Consisted of some marble magnitude.  
But better this for monument than crude  
Trapping on a page with a black breath.  
That could turn the sourest tongue more sour.  
To see thought stiffen and contort can be  
Too excellent a reminder of an hour  
Already rendered much too readily.

Small stones. This deep remove  
No man can quarry and no word can prove.  
If all the answers tendered and applied  
Curved firm containers for the tears we've cried . . .  
But no schemes from philosophies apply.  
A child has fashioned no pat way to die.

*Toward the destruction of luxury:*

To lose what we had learned from what we saw  
We sift through rubble for an unburnt straw,  
But there are none. No, we had never guessed  
Our civilization weak as all the rest;  
We had built on sand on purpose, we  
Used insubstantial fabric to keep free,  
To stay precarious. That was the key,  
We thought. Spend life within our lavish tents  
And raise illusion through extravagance.

But ropewalkers had flipping hearts. Too bad.  
Our clowns were wept and giggled out. Too bad.  
The trainers had not tamed themselves. Too bad.  
We should have known it of a canvas town.  
It is a short time till the show's torn down.

## In Search of the Indian Novel

IRONIES HAUNT the encounter of East and West. To search for the contemporary Indian novel is to evoke complexities of understanding and misunderstanding developed through the long period of European scrutiny of India. The contemporary Indian is the product of his culture but he is also the creature of the scrutiny; from this ambivalence there develops an interplay of different levels of self-awareness. There is the level he is born into, a world of rites, privileges, and obligations whose horizon is the family, with just over the horizon the wall of caste. There is the level of white-collar activity, in the bureaucracies of office and school; here, he may begin to think of himself in relation to that official creation, "India." Then the ironic sublevels begin to multiply: a tenaciously particularized religiosity in a polyglot jungle of temples and swamis; a more or less official ideal tradition in aesthetics and philosophy but an actual history of eclectic ferment; "non-Western" ways of thinking often defined and infused by European romantic idealism. One thinks of Gandhi in London, rediscovering Hinduism by reading Annie Besant.

It is helpful to focus on one concept in trying to find a way to and through these shifting planes of irony; the natural focus, because it is the fundamental irony, is the concept of selfhood. The novel has from its inception been one of the primary means for experimentation with selfhood; all the glory and all the despair of man are reflected in his fiction. The long Western endeavor to build a concept of the self is now in the valley of the shadow of *Angst*, which it entered when the nineteenth century discovered in its cellar the Underground Man. What

## *In Search of the Indian Novel*

Indian tradition has had to say about selfhood has been called its distinctive contribution to the world's thought; the Indian in contemporary fiction, however, is struggling to regain or to escape his inheritance. In this essay I shall lay out some of the stock of ideas and mention a few of the works of literature which have for better or for worse prepared the Western reader to evaluate contemporary Indian fiction. At the end I shall look at some Indian novels in English, in particular those of R. K. Narayan.

For purposes of analysis I should like to refer to the three dominant Indian concepts of selfhood, *karma yoga*, *bhakti yoga*, and *jñāna yoga*. The goal of each *yoga* is the union of self with Self, which may be defined paradoxically as the discovery of self through loss of it, less paradoxically as the resolution of the accidental ego of history into some phase of being *sub specie aeternitatis*. This is the goal of many directions of endeavor, of which the three I have mentioned may be defined this way: *karma yoga*, the discovery of Self through disinterested action; *bhakti yoga*, the discovery of Self through devotion; *jñāna yoga*, the discovery of Self through knowledge. Of these the first two provide for my discussion of the novels a polarity of love and detachment in a fictional world where sex and death have always been dominant.

A person endowed with the Keatsian "negative capability" is ripe for *karma yoga*; as Keats suggested, the art of the poet and novelist may be an extension of this imaginative process, whereby one is able to disengage from the accidents of historical individuality, to see and manipulate them as secondary qualities, as *māyā*. The inner self may be peaceful and humane while "I" am a soldier (Arjuna's dilemma in the *Bhagavad Gītā*); he may also, of course, be a thief or a Don Juan while "I" remain on the whole a decent chap. If the inner self is a self of imagined alternatives, the better one's ego is the worse in comparison one's alternatives may become. The saint acts out his good and dreams both night and day of sin; the sinner has a clearer dream of heaven. Thus it is in *karma yoga* that the moral goal may transcend any usual ethics. The very sanctity

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of the saint must be got beyond (as Dostoevsky may have been saying when he left the body of Father Zossima to rot and fester in the pages of *The Brothers Karamazov*). All imagined selves, consciously and unconsciously created, must be lived out to the last in the cycle of *samsāra*, reincarnation, an immense and completely enacted psychoanalysis, a cosmic psychodrama. Salvation lies in transcending all alternatives until one attains pure being. The closest Western analogy is to be found in the philosophy of Schopenhauer, who shared the Buddha's apprehension of suffering as the first fact of existence, which when intellectually apprehended leads to a denial of the will to live.

*Bhakti* is devotion to being in an incarnation of it; it is, says Radhakamal Mukerjee (in *Lord of the Autumn Moons*) a "rapture of the self in and with the Self," through love for some Other, as an incarnation of Iśvara. He suggests that *bhakti* is analogous to the *anima* of Jung, the complementary feminine element in the unconscious of every man. Its forms range from gigantic to tender, from Eros to Agape. It is Krishna and the Gopis; it is yab-yum; it is the Tantric Śiva-Śakti. There is no motion of the libido which *bhakti* is incapable of transforming into communion with Self; one thinks for example of the astonishingly sensual works of art at Ajantā, Khajurāho, Konārak, and elsewhere. "Can the path of desire lead to the cessation of desire?" asks Mukerjee. Again and again the novelist answers, "Yes."

Early travelers sometimes saw superficial similarities between Christianity and Hinduism, such as the resemblance of the Trimurti to the Trinity. As these shallow comparisons ceased to be made, the stereotype began to be applied that India is the native home of spiritual truth, to be sought out by refugees from the sinking ship of Christianity. How this pilgrimage may involve *bhakti* may be seen in the Indophile Pierre Loti. Here he is at the beginning of his *L'Inde sans les Anglais* (1903):

With what anxiety that I might find nothing, with what fear that I might be deceived at last, I go now there, to that India, cradle of human

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thought and of prayer, not as formerly to put lightly into port, but, this time, to demand peace from the depositaries of aryan wisdom, to entreat them to give me, in place of the ineffable Christian hope which has vanished, at least their belief, more austere, in an indefinite prolongation of souls. . . .

At the end of the book he has reached Benares and has taken instruction from the sages of the Vedanta. But the moment of greatest religious insight in the closing pages occurs one morning when he sees a beautiful young woman come down to the bathing ghat:

And the muslins, violet and yellow, outline in detail her proud and lovely bosom, the line of her supple loins, all the harmony of her young body.

"She is me, I am her, and we are God," the sages had said to me. And it seems that their serenity already commences to envelop me.

For a long time I watch her, she who is there, without disturbance or somber regret; I rest my eyes upon her as upon a young sister whose beauty makes me proud; an intimate brotherhood unites us to each other, and we participate in the immense splendor spread out this morning upon the world; we are the light, we are nature with its thousand faces, and we are the universal Spirit. In this rare instant one would say there almost fell for me just a little those "illusory limitations which produce the *desires of individual being*."

In the way in which that passage sublimates sexual desire there is foreshadowed much of the fiction of the twentieth century. One thinks for example of the famous and influential passage in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, where Stephen Dedalus, also in flight from Christianity, encounters along the beach a girl—no, not a girl, a poetic vision compounded of Botticellian Venus and idealized colleen, a delicate but fully sensual picture which marks, however, the advent of a new kind of religious ecstasy into Stephen's soul. The parallel in Joyce may be counted a digression; more apropos we might notice the relationship between *karma yoga* and sexuality presented by W. Somerset Maugham in *The Razor's Edge*. Larry Darrell, the pilgrim to India who learns from his *guru* not only the art of hypnotic healing but more deeply a true detachment from ego,

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is also presented as an entirely disinterested sexual power, merely the sight of whose wrist is able to stir a powerful lust in a woman who desires him, partly because she senses in him something permanently virginal.

An unkind critic might feel about each of these examples that the sublimation of libido is merely a romantic ineptitude. The experience of sexual intercourse, with its descent of the soul into the body, might certainly be described as the loosing of ego into Self. It is a part of the psychology of the act, so personal and yet so un-individual, that it should have for a long time served in the Western tradition as a symbol of spiritual union with Divinity, most evidently in the interpretation of the Song of Songs. Is it possible that the view of the sensual statues at Khajurāho and Konārak which sees them as images of divine union is an importation from the West? Some learned critics consider them merely degenerate; recently Dale Riepe has used them as evidence of the strong and often forgotten naturalistic tradition in Indian thought. The continued influence of Schopenhauer provides another analogy, for the West, in the speculative works of Freud and of some of his interpreters, for example, Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown. In *Life Against Death* Brown emphasizes the health and the creative power of that kind of experience of life which Freud identified in the infant and called "polymorphous perversity." The phrase implies an unqualified receptivity of the self to pleasure in the broadest sense. The "undifferentiated aesthetic continuum" defined by F. S. C. Northrop in *The Meeting of East and West* is also analogous.

In the larger sense, *karma yoga* and *bhakti yoga*, contrary motions of the self away from ego, are seen to be complementary. It is only in the shallow view that one suggests withdrawal from and the other immersion in the world of illusion. *Māyā* is not merely negative; it is *sakti* and *prakṛti*, the procreant power of the godhead.

Fermenting in the writings of Thomas Mann there is an irrationalism which fuses soul and body and focuses its brilliant irony on the collapse of selfhood. Mann's symbolism is mainly

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tied to Europe, in the contrast of North and South, but in his novels he repeatedly used "the East" to mean primal, archetypal instinct and selfhood. In *The Magic Mountain*, for example, there are the fascinating high cheek-bones and Oriental eyes of the youth Pribislav and the fatal woman Clavia Chauchat, who might be called the *anima* of Hans Castorp. The particular work of Thomas Mann's that is relevant here is his short novel, *The Transposed Heads, A Legend of India*. Mann expands an ancient story, which may be found in the new collection, *Tales of Ancient India*, edited by van Buitenen. A tale which in its original form is quite complicatedly ironic is pushed to several further stages of ironic inversion, all turning on the relations of ego to self and of mind to body. Two friends, the cerebrotonic Shridaman and the somatotonic Nanda, fall in love with the beautiful-hipped Sita. Their first glimpse of her as she bathes by the temple of Mother Kali in a tributary of the Ganges is presented by Mann in a memorable passage of sensuous description with touches of religious awe, reminiscent of both Loti and Joyce. Since a lengthy paraphrase of the story would not make it any less startlingly implausible than a quick summary, let me simply say that Sita is married to the man of mind but yearns for the man of body. In a temple of Kali the two men cut off their own heads; the Mother Goddess rather sardonically answers the penitent Sita's prayer that they be restored to life: Sita is to put the heads and trunks together and mend them with a prayer. But, alas, what a colossal Freudian slip! Sita restores her husband Shridaman's head to the body she desires, giving away her husband's body to the head of Nanda. The decision of a holy man to resolve this dilemma is that she is married to the head; therefore she may retain the body she has lusted for. But now Mann pursues the story in a further ironic reversal. Because it is ruled by Shridaman's head, the body of Nanda begins to lose its vigor, which cannot be maintained by Shridaman's life of commerce and reading. Meanwhile the head of Nanda has taken Shridaman's body into the woods and made of it a thing of strength and beauty. Irony is compounded by irony before a strange *suttee*.

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marks the end of the story, which I recommend to anyone who wishes to study the workings of *māyā*.

Another European writer with a profoundly ironic relationship to the East is Hermann Hesse, who shares with Mann a liking for the *bildungsroman*, with a growing emphasis on childhood and youth, earlier and less self-conscious phases of identity, in the search for the deepest motives of action. In *Siddhartha*, he leads his protagonist to the Buddha in the Buddha's own way. That is, Siddhartha does not, like his friend Govinda, follow the Buddha, become a "Buddhist"—he follows his own path and becomes a Buddha, or Bodhisattva. In the concluding scene of identity and transfiguration, Govinda, who has been a Buddhist monk, looks into the face of Siddhartha, who has spent his life immersed in the ego. Ironically, it is Siddhartha who is transformed; in his face Govinda sees the teeming multitudinousness of life itself, in all its beauty and in all its horror. Something comparable to this experience is described by Swami Vivekananda, when he relates the last meeting he had with Ramakrishna; there is the same mingling of horror and bliss, of loss of self into Self, the same transcending of the boundaries of personality, modeled after the vision of Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. In his *Blick ins Chaos* (1921) Hesse diagnosed the sickness of twentieth-century Europe and forecast its downfall and rebirth. The agent of this cycle was to be the Dostoevskian personality, described by Hesse in Schopenhauer's language as a return to primal selfhood, originating from the East, the home of the Faustian "Mothers." For history's answer see *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts* and other documents of "German Aryanism." T. S. Eliot quoted a passage from Hesse's pamphlet in another and a more influential diagnosis of the sickness of Western culture, *The Waste Land*, which closes with the sound of the thunder as promising rain and rebirth; the thunder is presented and interpreted in terms of the thunder fable of the fifth section of the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*.

Easily the most significant work of English literature to deal with India is E. M. Forster's brilliant novel. *A Passage to India*

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is noted for its treatment of religious and social intolerance; I wish to emphasize here the way in which these questions are worked out symbolically in a poetically complex but narratively effective treatment of questions of personal identity. For example, Mrs. Moore, the elderly Englishwoman, suffers a complete loss of ego, a radical detachment in which there is Nothing and Truth and they are the same. "Poor little talkative Christianity" dies in her soul. But Mrs. Moore becomes the saint of this novel, in fantastic and subtle ways. She is kind to a wasp; she says "God is love"—these and other fragments resound through the novel and influence Christian, Moslem, and Hindu. She even turns up as a goddess of popular Hinduism, whose name is chanted as "Esmiss Esmoor." Thus is she compensated for the destruction of her personality: she becomes a spirit of love and worship in the soul of India. In her *bhakti*, *karma*, and *jñāna* merge.

In this sampling of Western philosophers and novelists one can see the familiar trajectory of Western individualism, rising to embrace the cosmos and falling into profound and ironic despair. Always in the distance there is a vision of spiritual wholeness—India. Like so many visions it may recede as one approaches it. The Western reader may feel at first a great disappointment when he discovers that the Indian novelists are concerned for the most part not with grand dramas of spiritual transcendence but with intimate and largely comic studies of timorous selfhood.

The exceptions may as well be mentioned immediately. An immense and rather calculated panorama of cultural self-awareness is presented in Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope*. The hero is a Brahmin who quotes Baudelaire, Dante, and Rilke as readily as passages in Sanskrit and who is writing a thesis on the Cathars. His French wife progresses toward loss of self in Buddhism. The intersection of their lives is told in passages of studied eroticism and long conversations about ontology and theology, the whole underlined by sickness and psychoanalysis. One feels the presence of a real story behind the intellectual pretentiousness of the style. There are other novels, such as

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the *Mano Majra* of Khushwant Singh and *The Village and Coolie* by Mulk Raj Anand, which give what must be honest and certainly are brutal pictures of political, social, and economic turmoil. But they do not portray convincing individuals; the characters are ruthlessly exploited for situations and ideas. This is particularly noticeable in the implausibly melodramatic and didactic conclusion of *Mano Majra*, written under the impact of the partition massacres. *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* is a better though less exciting book.

Of course, fairly successful social comedy can also be written without deep and convincing characterization, as in Santha Rama Rau's *Remember the House* or in the light and sprightly works of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala. In the *ballet comique* of her last novel, *The Householder*, one finds the standard ingredients: the arranged marriage, the slowly sublimated lust of her husband, the redeemed ignorance of the wife, the pathetic defeat of the mother, and in the midst, to the confusion and embarrassment of all, the starry-eyed Westerner seeking "enlightenment." Everything is very funny but also rather tedious, chiefly because we do not know the hero well enough to identify ourselves with him.

An instructive contrast which suggests depths of characterization not often sounded by Indian fiction may be found by turning to two very interesting autobiographies. *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* by Nirad C. Chaudhuri, supplemented by his more recent *A Passage to England*, introduces us to a cultured and humane Indian gentleman, just as fascinating as but no more exotic than Matthew Arnold. He calls the survival of Hinduism a "mummified continuity"; he describes himself as having a "Copernican" view of Indian history, replacing a comfortable but fictitious unity with an uncomfortable but honest pluralism. Quite different is the fictionalized autobiography of Sudhindra Nath Ghose, now extending to four volumes. He writes in a style of witty indirection and shifting planes of reference in which a Westernized environment is experienced through an ego which turns out to be most deeply motivated by a selfhood with roots in Indian myth. The love

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affair which is central to *The Flame of the Forest*, the latest volume, is developed in terms of *bhakti*; the heroine is, symbolically, *Rādhā*, in the guise of a wandering religious singer. At the very end of the book the narrator decides to join her; it is impossible to be sure how much his decision is motivated by merely sensual desire and how much by *bhakti*. Can the path of desire lead to the cessation of desire?

Kamala Markandaya's *A Silence of Desire* also attempts to answer this question. Quite superior to her other novels, it is a competent if not altogether convincing study of the growth of sexual desire into a higher form of devotion, as it happens in a marriage which is deeply shaken by the illness of the wife, and shaken more deeply by the psychological shocks which accompany the sickness—jealousy and mutual distrust on sexual and on religious grounds. The gap between the wife with her simple inherited faith and the Westernized preconceptions of her husband is closed at the end by his discovery that deep within him there is an Indian self to match his wife's, and by the sublimation of his lust into *bhakti*. Markandaya's latest novel, *Some Inner Fury*, follows a woman to the crucial, melodramatic point where she must choose between a Western lover and insurgent India. The climactic courtroom scene is reminiscent of a similar scene in *A Passage to India*.

The novels of R. K. Narayan deal with many of the themes I have mentioned, in a deftly ironic style that has been likened to Gogol's. I should like to end this essay by taking a quick look at most of his novels and a slower look at one of them. The scene of Narayan's books is the imaginary South Indian village of Malgudi, near Madras. There is probably a strong autobiographical tenor in them. *Swami and Friends* introduces us to a schoolboy, Swaminathan, who is torn between his affection and admiration for his friend Rajam, whose father is the Police Superintendent, and his unplanned emotional participation in window-breaking, foreign-cap-burning, and such-like with dimly patriotic motives. I read this book somewhat symbolically as an attempt, perhaps unconscious on Narayan's part, though I doubt it, to explore the motives of Indian politics, in a regres-

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sion to childhood as the basis of the inner self. At least when I approach Narayan in this way I am able to think I understand better a very curious book which he wrote more recently, *Waiting for the Mahatma*. The hero of this novel is, as it were, Swami grown up and much duller. He is drawn purely by his love for a young girl disciple of Gandhi into revolutionary activities. Because he acts blindly out of desire for her and is too stupid to understand what he is doing, he lends his support actually to the violence of terrorism, not to the forces of *satyagraha*. However, he wins his girl with Gandhi's blessing; the novel ends abruptly with the assassination of Gandhi on the very day he is to marry the two. For me this strange and not really very pleasant novel is again a symbolic exploration of motives, and indicates the failure of a conceptual selfhood to explain Indian behavior. In another respect the book may be a *tour de force* in which Gandhi's personality is assessed from the lowest point of view one could possibly adopt. It is as if Narayan asked himself, "Into how small a person can I get and still feel something of the impact of Gandhi's personality?" (Just such a *tour de force* was accomplished by R. L. Duffus in *The Innocents at Cedro*, written as a nobody's view of a strange and powerful person, Thorstein Veblen, who does not actually appear in the book but dominates it from beginning to end.) As a political novel *Waiting for the Mahatma* conveys a sense of Gandhi's power over individuals but also a sense of his weaknesses, in particular his inability sometimes to see the whole truth about his followers.

In *The Bachelor of Arts* we have another instalment of *bildungsroman*—the story of the college boy Chandran, something of a Lucky Jim. Narayan suggests an aspect of the ironic selfhood of the Westernized Indian by his amusing satire of Indian teachers, the builders and the victims of the false façade of English culture. For instance, there is Mr. Gajapathi, Assistant Professor of English:

He read Shakespeare in a sing-song fashion, and with a vernacular twang. He stopped now and then to criticize other critics. Though Dowden had said so-and-so, Mr. Gajapathi was not prepared to be

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brow-beaten by a big name . . . he asserted that there were serious errors even in Fowler's *Modern English Usage*. . . .

The second half of *The Bachelor of Arts* takes us through a hopeless love affair and into a marriage. In between the two, Chandran spends a period as a *saddhu*; upon his return he is able to be happy as a salesman and to find happiness in his arranged marriage (the pathetic comedy of the horoscopes is particularly well described), even though the measure of his loss of ego is that he decides to seek marriage only after the toss of a coin.

*The Financial Expert* and *The Printer of Malgudi* are wonderful studies of worldliness and collapse. Margayya, the financial expert, hungers desperately for wealth; he attains it, his initial success being gained by the publication of a pornographic manuscript—or is it, one wonders, a commentary on the *Kama Sutra*? Parallel to his rise to wealth and eventual collapse is the pathetic story of his disappointment in his son Balu. The goings-on in *The Printer of Malgudi* are practically impossible to describe. One hilariously memorable and unparaphraseable bit is a young artist's attempted ravishment of an actress while she is in the middle of a scene playing the role of Parvathi in a movie about Siva. *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* now continues this series.

*Grateful to Life and Death* is a tender and unusual variation on the familiar situation of the arranged marriage. A husband, happily living the bachelor days of a college teacher, finds he must make a life with a wife whom he hardly knows. The love for her that slowly begins to flower in him approaches its climax only after her premature death. The strength of his love is rewarded when he finds a medium who establishes psychic contact with Susila's spirit. This communion transfigures his life; at the same time he is being influenced towards a truer *dharma* by an odd but selfless schoolmaster who becomes a *sanyasi*. In a final psychic communion Susila has really returned: here are the closing sentences of the book, which express with rare delicacy the union of self and Self.

We stood at the window, gazing on a slender, red streak over the

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eastern rim of the earth. A cool breeze lapped our faces. The boundaries of our personalities suddenly dissolved. It was a moment of rare, immutable joy—a moment for which one feels grateful to Life and Death.

But the most interesting of Narayan's works is *The Guide*. This novel must be based on a traditional tale, for I find a version of it recounted by Simons Roof in his *Journeys on the Razor-Edged Path*. It is the story of a robber who hastily assumes the role of a *saddhu* to escape detection, only to find in time that his vocation is a real one when he acquires a disciple for whom he is quite unintentionally but quite truly a *guru*. Narayan's telling of this story relates how Raju, a village boy who develops into a rather cynical tourist guide, falls in love with Rosie, a visiting *bhāratya nātyam* dancer, steals Rosie from her preoccupied scholar-husband, and manages her career to outstanding success, only to be jailed at the height of his triumph for a minor mistake. After he has served his sentence he leaves the jail; then it is that he assumes the role of *saddhu*, simply because it presents itself as an easy way to keep himself fed and out of harm's way for a while. But, partly through the devotion of the simple villager Velan, he finds the role growing on him in spite of himself. When drought strikes the village he embarks insincerely upon a fast, then finds that something in him compels him to do it honestly. At the very end of the book, after many days of fasting he is led out by Velan to stand at the water's edge, where he collapses:

"Velan, it's raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs—" He sagged down.

I have told the story in chronological sequence, but one of the intriguing things about *The Guide* is that it is not told that way. The book begins in the third person, as Raju leaves the jail and takes up his pretense of being a holy man. Then begins a series of flashbacks, scattered through the other narrative, which takes Raju from his childhood up through his success to the moment of disaster. These flashbacks are narrated in the first person. The technique may sound rather confusing but it is brought off very well. Part of its interest is the way in

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which the alternation from third person to first person and back again reinforces what is happening in terms of the psychology of selfhood. In the first-person narrative we follow the growth of ego to its moment of disaster. In the third-person narrative we follow the unwilling but inevitable collapse of the ego into selfless action. Because he responded to and called forth in Rosie only the sensual aspects of life, because desire did not lead to the cessation of desire, that is, did not become transfigured into something higher than lust, Raju must embark on the higher and more difficult path of *karma yoga*, the renunciation of the fruits of action and the renunciation of ego. But the force which leads Raju to enter this path is not rational, is not conceptual, not a part of his will nor of his intellect.

"Knowledge is incapable of harmonizing the luminous ego with the dark erring human being that is cast out into an individual fate," wrote Hermann Weyl, beautifully expressing the universal human dilemma of self-consciousness. Writers and saints of both East and West have at one time or another followed all the directions of thought which lead away from this central insight. The most characteristic path of the West has been toward an intensity of individualism, a hunger for uniting the ego to that active historical being, a hunger which at its most intense becomes the immortality-hunger of a Miguel de Unamuno. This adventure of the spirit has been expressed in a radical dualism and supported by what has seemed to be the infinitely extendable machinery of logic. Just as neither of these "Western" modes of thought is missing from the thought of India, so in the West from Heraclitus through Freud we have a native tradition which can keep us from relying solely on logic and conceptualization. The novelists of East and West remind us that the primary role of the irrational is to serve not as an extension of nor as a substitute for the reason but as the basis for the primary and uniquely inexplicable assertion of selfhood by every human being.

# *Lewis Turco*

## TOAD

Your eyes, like lost volcanos  
almost split upon the firefly which blundered,  
a quantum of daylight,  
into your tongue.

Where was there sense in  
that flicker and swallow—  
then silence settling, as a wart  
settles, around your body darkness?

Under a leaf, in a stone's mouth,  
beneath a root, what's the logic:  
this perpetuation of bulk  
squatting in solitude?

Your skin is dry. When touched,  
the sack of your existence  
squirts a dark liquid hopelessly  
upon the palm that would hold what you are.

You are dropped for loathing.  
You have swallowed brightness  
but give none in exchange except,  
now and then, a reflection of decay.

When goaded, your movement is infirm.  
You halt anywhere,  
bottom down, to assume the stance  
of a peripatetic fungus.

It is said you inhabit gardens;  
that you do no ill:  
but quickness arrested can be no good  
and vegetables need no bodyguard.

So wings flicker, moth wings;  
the lamps of fireflies fall into your eyes  
and are finished. The volcanos  
of your eyes erupt with silence.

### MY COUNTRY WIFE

My country wife bends to rinse. Her skirt is  
unwrinkled. Its print of flowers rounds  
out her womb like the rug of violets  
that mounds or dimples the chapel  
burying ground. She would be grotesque where  
hydrants irrigate gutters.

Here, she is a slight of the moon; the sound  
a mole makes. She stoops and carries. She  
cooks and smiles her meals down my throat. I need  
no teeth. She has done what the bee  
does to clover. The sun moves around. She  
stays and stays. She sweeps and cooks.

# *Nancy Sullivan*

## MOSAICS: THE MORNING PEOPLE (Little historical love poems)

### 1

Was there love in the Eden garden  
When out from Adam's clicking ribs  
Eve fully naked and female sprang?  
Or did the heart of God compensate  
Them later only with this curious force  
As the pair fled out at angles  
Early that burning morning under cover  
And coat, under circling angels into the world?

### 2

It all happened in a blaze of insight.  
Rich with lily and cloth of gold,  
Her hair a mass of morning.  
The Flemish angel called the question:  
"Can you?" "Will you?"  
Aware of Joseph and of the certain complications,  
She replied, and love illuminated  
Her womb with affirmation  
Although the room was cool and the day dark.

### 3

Lazarus lost his sense of taste.  
The wine was water, the water wine.  
He walked a curiosity to those who loved him,  
One to which they might have charged admission.  
But when the evening came with all its memories  
Of the dark places and the heavy stone,  
The odyssey of the sudden lover lifted and shone:  
It was always morning in his mind.

## 4

The names of the saints and martyrs  
 Shower a chorus of separate sounds:  
 John, Stephen, Matthias, Barnabas,  
 Ignatius, Alexander, Marcellinus,  
 Peter, Felicity, Perpetua, Agatha,  
 Lucy, Agnes, Cecily, Anastasia.  
 They gild their cells on the prison page  
 With light and peace, and cool repose.  
 Let the whole earth keep holiday.

## 5

King Clovis, Frankish and thirty, married to Clotilda, St.,  
 Burgundian princess, battled with God one morning  
 At Alemanni. A semi-victor, he bore the sweet yoke  
 Of baptism, of Gaul, and of much of Germany.  
 Only Charlemagne, and that some multi-thousand  
 Mornings later, made more of a monarchy.  
 Sing matin hymns, songs of Roland.

## 6

John the Baptist awakening  
 From a tedious, desert dream  
 Discovered his heart, a wanton metrenome,  
 Beating a code of carols against his skin  
 Despite, despite  
 The frantic circle of his love's  
 "Make straight, make straight!"

## 7

There is a dawn in Turner even in the sunsets,  
 An annunciation in his mind,  
 All golden pigment above the entry ports of Venice and Calais.  
 And Matisse too, drawing those wide-awake ladies  
 Through a gallery of sleepless nights  
 Arose with them to the sun  
 And to other glories in the fruit of afternoon.

## MEN STANDING AROUND

Men standing alone or in a group:  
A Caesar at his forum,  
Three on the curved corner  
Cut a trinity to boredom.  
I envy men standing around  
Being—collars up, hands pocketed  
Against activity, that elusive hound.  
Yesterday, how contemplative a Pharaoh  
High on a beggar's pyramid of stairs  
Stood rigid, his stone eyes lairs  
Where the simple landscape burrowed.

Statues in the park in bronze battle poses  
Tell little about the men or the ruses  
Of the war that brought them finally  
Home to these benches and to the stances  
Of the sidewalk: the sight of a man  
Just standing, bravely being  
Neither hero nor Saint Francis.  
Once delicate as morning kisses  
Hermits on the shifting desert stood so,  
Shy and covered over with their privacy.

Men standing on these passive corners bearing  
The curses of the world and all its crooked courses,  
Your pursuits are those of angels,  
And saints and statesmen share your quiet virtues.

*John Tagliabue*

## Kabuki Recollected

### *I. Preparing for a Boat or a Stage?*

THE WOODEN ASPECT of a building in Nature is apparent here. All the world's a stage—or a boat in the Air. Before leaving Japan, after seeing more than a hundred Kabuki plays (and many Noh and Bunraku and Awaji plays), I remember some of the things I like by writing a few Notes.

### *II. The Sound Abounds: Samisen.*

If you close your eyes at the Kabuki Theater even that can be enough, enough circus, enough antics, enough marvel—of sounds, of sound effects, wooden clappers, dancing mimes in your dream, samisens, drums, now and then a flute. I'm not saying you should close your eyes, though some do, fall asleep and sustain poetry in that way. In Kabuki everything is a lyrical part of the decorative and popular entertainment. Everything is translated into the poetry of the theater, into the festival and fantasy of the theater. It is amazingly rich and complicated and extravagant and still it seems effortless, light; hanamichi (flower path) and all become part of the floating world. Spontaneity. Improvisation. The acting-music-dancing go on for hours prolifically like children coming and going in Japan.

Someone in the audience often participates, shouts a noise; you don't have a theater where in a Museum Frame some Symbols and Problems are brought forth in fedoras and bourgeois suits—but where the music comes through the audience, weeping, applauding, eating, sleeping, calling out the name of the

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Hero in great colors like a Kite in the Dream of the People. Ki, the wooden clappers, startle and the play begins. Often on the side of the panorama there are reciters and musicians singing a story; this can be very fierce and dramatic. Sometimes the Actor's voice is echoed, *expanded* by the Chorus, enlarged to anywhere in the scenery; the narrators chanting on the side *extend* the story and the Actors like dream-walkers in kimonos are the particular-haunted imagery on this *wide* scene. Sometimes during a quiet or intense conversation on the tatami a note or two is sounded by the samisen; later it accumulates in speed and sound.

In all this—pantomime, music, stylized speech—there is something easy, light, effortless, vast, a sense of space, what the Japanese call “mu”; a colored leaf falls from a tree. *The poetry of weather*, as in Japanese poetry, on the Kabuki stage is made into a light play too. Sometimes the sound of crickets, of birds, is part of the silence, part of the passing poetry of seasons, fireflies on the stage; a few sounds from a koto; the excitement of samisens.

Sometimes the singers and musicians are behind screens, sometimes on a high level (perched like birds or stories above the side entrances), sometimes on a lower level. Many surprises of sounds from different parts of the wide stage and abundant audience. Some courtesans, some warriors, some comic cats (*kyogen*) come down the hanamichi. Here we have wigs and artifice borne like comedies in a religious dance, popular fanfare. I take it to be that. There are many different kinds of plays, about different periods, many different styles of speaking. (Instead the grey monotonous voices in some bourgeois western plays seem like a series of fedora hats.) In Kabuki an allegory, *a game*, is made of the different musical ways of voices. The warriors have a way of acting up, making faces that make flying kites seem timid, sounds that this sentence cannot recreate; the children on stage “meow” in a special way; the women's voices are very different too. The differences in pitch, tone, speed, are marvellous even if you are in the pitch dark.

At the Kabuki Theater even with your eyes closed you are

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amidst a great life of color and antics; and when you open your eyes the music becomes apparent—in the costumes, gestures, scenery, everything. Often I take it to be that easily, greatly; it's much of the best entertainment I've heard and seen.

### *III. Scenery or Costumes? Seasons or Actors?*

In the Good Old Days the Greeks and Shakespeare and Others had theaters outside. The Japanese did too—before Kabuki, and occasionally still do. Recently I saw Kagura (shrine dances) and Kyogen (farces) and Noh plays outside and a few days ago masked Gagaku dancers in green perform by the trees in front of Meiji Shrine. I like to see birds and air wandering in and out of the play. The sense of time and space in these plays is very different and the dispersed audience asleep or awake somehow to me seems "freer"; "culture" caught in the Concert Hall has something to do with the canning of people. The Kabuki plays are indoors but suggest great space, changing seasons. The theater has effects of snow, moving rivers, falling blossoms, smoke, fire, and smell of incense burning, etc., suggestions of rain (there's enough of that outside) which give excuses for poses with open umbrellas. For artists anything is an excuse for artifice, for actors anything an excuse for posing. On the stage we often see the whole house, the garden, trees, flowers, between the audience and the actors often some reeds, bushes; the Japanese house seen on the stage is itself on its stilts (like an actor on wooden shoes) a stage upon a stage. Trees are often mighty and crooked on the great stage—as they are in a way worshipped and made into art off-stage. Sometimes I just gape at some part of a sliding door (sliding painting); I become stage struck by it; I say this beats Mondrian. In Japan the arts are often active imitating each other; Kabuki and ukiyo-e imitating each other; Kabuki and Bunraku; sumi-e; a black slash on the brow; lips painted black. In Kabuki usually the actors are not masked but the stylized make-up is a kind of mask, a kind of painting.

An allegory floating in the weather. Compared to this some-

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times the western living room play seems like a closet drama in which I picture a clock, a fedora hat, Problems, Furniture and Literary Symbols. Just the movement of one kimono out-symbolizes and outcolors all the notions of a domestic play. A little startling too: while I am watching a series of geishas like festivals close to each other and sitting, an elaborate geisha from the "outside world" walks into the theater, down the aisle and takes her place looking at the ones on the platform in front of gold.

A king of thieves, his face white, dressed in green chartreuse in the dark night comically and graciously stalks down the hanamichi.

The Kabuki theater has its vista of games, a sense of holidays, a way of marking the seasons. There are plays for the New Year, plays for Spring; new ones are written for new holidays which multiply; there were many to celebrate the wedding of the Crown Prince—*Keishoku Meika no Kotobuki* and I think a new version of Sambaso dancing with fan in one hand and clashing bells in the other. I saw *Ninin Sambaso*, a traditional dance-prayer for peace and a good harvest. And *Mukashi-Banashi Momotaro* a new play to celebrate the debut of Kanzaburo Nakamura's four-year-old son. This is a version of the familiar folk tale about Momotaro, a little boy who was born out of a peach that came floating down the river into the hands of an old woman who was washing clothes there. Soon after his birth the boy announces that he is off to subdue the ogres of Oni-ga Shima, a notorious island. One by one his new companions appear and promise to help him on his journey—a dog, a monkey, and a pheasant. Then a halt is called and the four-year-old boy the first time on the stage is formally introduced as Kankuro Nakamura; it is very amusing to see him small on the enormous stage and to see and hear him in the grand old style; then the story proceeds and the little boy and his friends subdue the comic ferocious ogres; an initiation ceremony for the Matinee Idol to be; then the radiant hero walks down the hanamichi of the huge theater carrying the island's treasure with him.

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Fireworks become certain stage Types and they pose. I saw several of these *kao mise* ("face showing") plays; the celebrities present Themselves, showing off their Characteristics; a salutary introduction. In one of these, *Tsumoru Koi no Seki no To*, the Spirit of the Cherry Tree dances and with her magic protects the tree from Kurenushi who wants to destroy it.

There was one play *Sukeroku no Momoyogusa* which outdid all Kabuki plays, which is going some, as a panorama of geishas. Several of them, much taller than the others because of their very lacquered wooden shoes and carrying all of their National Treasures with them, intricate and weighing several Splendors, mighty hair-pins and all, sat like slightly moving mountains of colors in front of a bright red background confronting the darkened audience. It begins with a light and elaborate and halting and slightly swaying procession as the chief geisha of the Pleasure Quarters, Agemaki (played by Utaemon) walks slowly and assisted, a colored umbrella very large held above her, towards the Stage. The audience is pleased to be so close to this procession of idealism. Sukeroku, her romantic lover, secretive and dashing, a rich merchant (one of the lower classes), is another ideal; he first appears on the hanamichi with a purple sash around his head and a large colorful umbrella; after a variety of decorative incidents of eroticism, suspicion, anger, the successful upstart kills a high class lord (who also wanted the geisha), runs away, jumps into a tub of water on the hanamichi; after hiding there for a little while he emerges pale and dripping and staggers towards the Pleasure Quarters again, faints; the geisha comes in time to hide him under her elaborate folds so various pursuing enemies do not perceive him. We are all sort of lost in the Scene. For the marathon theater lovers this isn't quite enough, so another play appears in a few minutes.

### *IV. Hanamichi. Tachimawari. And What Not.*

Hanamichi, the theatrical highway on which the gods or matinee idols come stalking down. Its ways of creating intimacy and effects can't be counted. Sometimes demons or ghosts or

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animals appear from one of its trap doors; actors, some on this bridge, some on the stage, carry on a recital over the heads in the dark. More often in the old days two hanamichis were used. I saw this only once in *Yoshinogawa*—"the Kabuki Romeo and Juliet play." Between the rival families of this story runs the Yoshino River; you *see* the river on the stage *moving* between the two houses; the parents from either side walk down the hanamichi and recite; we see at the same time the son and daughter in their separate houses; from above are seen many many cherry blossoms. At the end of the play the two heads of the lovers are floated in a small boat across the center of the stage. It is of course more slow, intense, complicated and beautiful than I suggest.

To reduce these plays to a synopsis, like reducing Shakespeare's plays to a plot outline, or taking the music away from a Verdi libretto, often makes them seem like confusing melodrama; the story of jealousy, revenge, murder in *Imoseyama Onna Teikin*; and *Sono Uwasa Sakura no Irodoki* in which a jealous sumo wrestler cuts off the head of a geisha and gives it to her lover. But what is stirring in many of the plays as well as what is colorful is *understood*, is the unconsciousness of the audience.

Many plays are about the slow and startling "recognition" of strangers on some journey in darkness; many about outcasts on the highway. These scenes like much great Japanese art create the meaning of distance, loneliness, intimate meetings in great space. In these plays that suggest a road, *an expanse*, sometimes a variety of incidents are going on at once; often comedy and tragedy, grandeur and silliness are mixed. (These "highway scenes" make me think of Brecht and *Waiting for Godot*. Festivals, acting, fantasies, in Cafes, in the theater, etc., are so natural here, I never feel any of this is "arty-and-experimental." Always we remember this is *play-acting*.)

The stylized "tachimawari"—a mock fight pantomime, a ballet of antics, of striking poses, these fantasies of success are perennial. Also in a billion Japanese movies; Odysseus killing off quickly all the suitors; Orlando on the roof: the samurai

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carrying his museum (his costume) with him often calmly performs easily against the most amazing and colorful chorus of odds. I've enjoyed such dance fights in forests, in heavy snow, on bridges while cherry blossoms are falling; samurai in their tents of fire fall like comets; in palaces splendid with sliding paintings and beautiful screens, in reeds by rivers. In the novel by Bakin *Nanso Satomi Hakkenden* there is a history of eight brothers (originally eight jewels engendered by a noble dog and a princess) representing eight samurai virtues; I saw them in the Hakkenden no Danmari scene enact a ballet fight on a grey sloping roof which takes up most of the huge stage.

### *V. The Actors.*

Despite the various musicians on stage, samisens, etc., changing weather, the Leading Actors still Prevail. They take up largely the entertainment. Although the Scenery is wonderful the Actor is not minimized at all—he almost carries it easily the way a masked king at a festival would carry a large kite Symbol of his presence. (On the wide screen of some movies the wide open spaces of the faces and the background seem to sadly merge.) The sense of *epic grandeur* of these Kabuki heroes is something which few plays elsewhere can create; I think Bunraku is even better at this; and Noh is my favorite theater. Earle Ernst, who has translated some of these plays, is hopeful: "The techniques of the Japanese theater (which have already influenced Reinhardt, Meyerhold, and Brecht, among others) may be helpful in suggesting how the Western theater can get on with its somewhat neglected but requisite business of being larger than life." The prevailing Kabuki Actors carry on the noble themes of loyalty and sacrifice. There are many scenes when staggering warriors come on, wild black hair; they stagger, they tell stories of the battle, they faint, they revive, they shake, they tell more stories, they sit with intensity and quivering with a shocking samurai loyalty.

Some people in the audience, excited, old time hypnotists of these persisting epics, call out the name of the approaching

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star—Kanzaburo, Ebizo. Once Tokizo. Once Kikugoro. These actors are born into the theater, start acting when they are a few years old and usually continue until their death. They usually perform about twenty-five days every month, with a few days at the end for rehearsals for the next set of plays; they perform most of the year. The morning set of plays often start around eleven and go on until four thirty and the afternoon set of different plays from five to around ten. There are a few long intermissions when people can go to one of the many restaurants in the theater or if they haven't had enough entertainment watch TV in the Lobby. These phenomenal actors, with their elaborate makeup, through winter and through hot summer months, wearing very heavy wigs and costumes, dancing, posing, reciting, carry on their antics all day and night, taking important parts in different plays. Sometimes for instance in one day Baiko will be a young geisha, a ghost, a comic old woman, an insane mother, a young warrior who commits suicide. Certain actors—Baiko, Utaemon—usually only play women; this and everything else in this theater forces them to *act* whether they are playing men or women, to invent the essential. Baiko on stage is not a woman any more than a Picasso portrait is a woman or Leonardo's Mona Lisa—it is an invention. Many aspects of this artifice and tradition are very amusing; the mannerism of moving the head suggested this poem:

The way  
the head of  
the onnagata fabulously  
slightly moves is like the world  
after shaking ecstasies in the galaxies  
tries delicately to get back in orbit  
or the way of a child's head  
reviewing heaven in this world slightly moves.

In these plays, as in Noh and Buddhism, transformations happen. In *Shunkyo Kagami Jishi* a beautiful young girl plays with a toy lion-head; it leads her off stage; the same actor

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soon after returns as a magnificent dancing lion excited into a whirling dance by two playful butterflies.

### *VI. Chushingura and the Bunraku Influence.*

At the beginning of *Chushingura* the great array of actors are seen posed and motionless on the stage (like puppets) and then as the *joruri* narrator recites the impressive names each character lifts his head and "comes to life" and when all this has happened and all the planets and stars have been "named," given that literary push, the constellation of action begins to whirl before us. This is a very popular play, usually put on once a year, an all day affair, about the 47 ronin of Lord Enya. A "ronin" is a masterless samurai, wandering, mastered by the memory of the heroic. It is one of the many "maruhon" plays that came from the Ballad Texts of the Osaka Bunraku Theater; in many ways the style of Kabuki has been influenced by this very great puppet theater—the make-up, the posing; later I'd like to write about Bunraku and also about the earlier and rougher Awaji Puppet Plays and those from Sado Island. In much Oriental dancing and drama there persists the imitation of the puppets which perhaps were more "primitive" and in ways imitated the actions of gods, demons, fantasies, legends. The Kabuki style imitates the bold and pictorial and rhythmical manner of these moving Images.

This Two Act play has magnificent scenes of honor and revenge. The suicide scene of Lord Enya is very slow and shocking. Here as in many other plays there is the art of *prolonging* a climax, making the *space between* the beginning and the event slowly hidden or dramatic. The gentle and strong samurai Lord Enya unable to control his anger tries to kill a master that everyone hates; because of this he prepares to commit suicide; his followers come to honor him; mats covered with white (the color of death) are prepared; he appears in white and in a very slow quiet exciting scene commits suicide. To see all of this whiteness on the Kabuki stage which usually has so much color is very shocking. And as often there is a sense of

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nobility and ceremony. There are other good scenes; the dark night scene by straw and reeds, the actors often in raincoats of grass, in which a thief instead of a wild boar who is running around on the stage is killed; the scene of Kampei's suicide; the Ichiriki Tea House Scene in Gion; the last scene of this long fanfare (making many fans) of an epic—late at night, in the Palace, and outside in heavy snow, a dance fight, many spears, the villain Morono is killed. We're all satisfied. And through the millions of people outside, below and between the kanji on fire, we go our various ways on trains, buses, taxis, subways, home.

In the Bunraku Theater there are some men (in ways like stage managers who come on and off with props, fans, swords, butterflies, parts of houses—or like weather men who help change the scenery and atmosphere of Japan, on and off stage it is ever-changing) men in black (sometimes head and face covered with a black veil too) (*anonymous* like the winds or destinies) very light and quick who manage the puppets; and in Kabuki these assistants who change scenery and costumes of the people on stage (sometimes while the large stage like a toy world is revolving) remain active, sometimes hidden like a shadow behind some seated braggart or warrior handing him a sword or a fan or what the occasion demands. The lightness of their flight or the almost inconspicuousness of their hiding is part of the *game*; I think they help give the play a sense of spontaneity, of being made up; they hammer away at sets, as the Main Actors proceed creating legends, poses, amidst the changing seasons. They carry away walls lightly. One kneels near the background holding a butterfly at the end of a long stick, making it play around the Leading Actor. Exit the problem plays dragging their Furniture; exit the dead "Professional Theater."

### *VII. Animals. Ghosts. Dances.*

Animals and ghosts appear easily. In *Meiboku Sendai Hagi* a large rat carries away an important scroll of names; an iron is thrown at him, the rat bleeds and disappears in a puff of smoke before our eyes; a minute later he reappears at the same

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place on the hanamichi as a villain with a slash on his brow. I saw the fox play many times, in Bunraku, and in Kabuki once with Utaemon, once with Baiko; it is Tadonobu, a fox in disguise, and beautiful girl who plays on a small drum and dances. In this play *Michiyuki Hatsume no Tabi* they dance and keep each other company on a long journey; in the meantime some ballads sing of the actions of great warriors. Dialogue becomes dance; prose and poetry are easily together; legend and realism are united. Even in a play that is by a writer mostly interested in the "katsureki" style of "historical realism," in *Takatoki* by Kawatake Mokuami, the realism of dreams masters the villain; the scenes show a tyrant who is cruel to his people and has a weird love for dogs; the shocking spectacle grows into a nightmare dance when "tengu" demons attack and exhaust the degenerate ruler. In *Heike-Gani* there are huge crabs with marks that make them look like human faces. In *Sasaki Takatsuna*, this is not so uncommon, there is an entertaining horse; the two actors who play the black horse both wear light blue socks so that the horse all black and lofty seemed to be walking on heaven.

These plays are full of plays, that is Disguises are full of disguises, that is the Imitation is full of legends; spies galore; warriors disguised as priests; demons disguised as beautiful women; spies disguised as outcast musicians who go around wearing hats that look like big straw baskets; rebels with half-moon scars; noble exiles who become blind beggars; your most festive self or grandfather disguised as a lion; warriors disguised as most beautiful haystacks; there is a sense that everything multiplies and changes and is prolific in Japan, fish, people, Kabuki plays.

In *Kamakura Sandai Ki* husbands are slightly in disguise and not recognized by their wives; this is not so unbelievable amidst the color and complexities, especially since sometimes when the marriage is arranged the husband and wife hardly look at each other at the wedding ceremony and thereafter he's not around much.

In some festivals—*Fuji Musume, Musume Dojoji*—the

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"onnagata" performs a series of delicate and erotic dances as the kimonos very quickly change amidst the flowers and commotion. The dances and often farces come at the end of a long program: *Dango-uri* (some rice-cake peddlers, man and wife, have a happy dance together); *Ninin-Bakama*, about an over-excited bridegroom who forgets his formal wedding pants and borrows his father's and they end up dizzy and dancing in the same pair of pants. *Ryusei* celebrates the Tanabata Festival; we see the dance of two starry lovers Kengyu and Shokuso (Altair and Vega) whose paths only meet once a year; and then the comic dance of a quarreling husband (the thunder god) and his comic evening wife.

Another farce celebrates a likeable pickpocket *Kurobei*. I saw Shoroku in this; he is a very vigorous and versatile actor, often a hearty and ingenious comedian. In *Yurei Kashiya* he was a lazy husband usually without money; his wife disowns him; but the ghost of a geisha (played by Baiko) takes a liking to him and entertains him every night stealing wine and food for him from the best restaurants; he decides to make some money by renting out the ghosts of geishas, several others are infatuated with him, to people who want to use them temporarily to scare enemies, etc.; then the old geisha becomes persistently jealous because of Shoroku's fooling around with the younger geisha and tries to kill him; he is rattled by these episodes; his wife returns to him; frightened and tired by too many amorous ghosts he decides to turn over a new leaf and the play ends morally.

### *VIII. Do you try to Collect the Floating World?*

How can I stop going to Kabuki? Perhaps I am too close to all the scenery to Recollect it. Maybe what happened to Quixote after reading too many books of knight errantry happened to me seeing Yoshiwara Etc. I have sat in all parts of the theater—a few days ago high in the air, a 250 yen side seat miles high; the May evening program; I was reaching the 100th play; if you lean over too far you find yourself crushed

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on the highway below or performing with the actors; from this great height I saw Baiko dance in a valley of irises. Once I sat in the first row center close to the breathing of Utaemon seeing the red paint around his eyes. And sitting near the hanamichi during one of the sword fights you have to be careful not to have your head cut off.

Then yesterday, beyond the 100th play, I again sat in the front close to the hanamichi where the Actor often stops for some entertaining stage business; I saw the May morning performances, Ebizo, Shoroku; Baiko who plays many different parts in the evening program played Komachi the famous poetess in a series of five dances concerning six poets; before that he was Lady Masaoka in one of my favorite plays, very difficult and intense, about sacrifice and violence, *Meiboku Sendai Hagi*. I saw this play a few months ago beautiful with Beika Ichikawa; since the war there has been a company, very skillful and with very good taste, of young women all about the same age; much lightness and freshness; they are especially good at melancholy love scenes and at dance festivals; two of the wonderful actresses Beika Ichikawa and Fukusho Ichikawa (who often plays bold warriors) are our friends. Tokizo's performance of Lady Masaoka was one of the greatest I've ever seen, tall, stark, tragic. (I saw him in 1959; he was in his 60's; I saw him also, and he was marvellous, act the part of a young woman dancing; he died about a year ago.) Lady Masaoka is a very noble nurse protecting a young prince; he is always in danger of being poisoned; her own son is his playmate and he always tries the food before the prince can eat it; some court women come elaborately on stage bearing a gift of food from the shogun; the Nurse's son knows his duty, rushes to the food, eats it, begins to die; one of the bearers of the gift stabs him immediately saying that he only deserves this for his impolite ways; the mother of the child in a staggering scene of slowness and restraint "conceals" her feelings until after they leave and she weeps by her dead son. The audience wept. It's very complicated; to describe the details of one still scene would be like recounting a long narrative poem; *it has to be seen*.

# William Carlos Williams

## POEM

The plastic surgeon who has  
concerned himself  
with the repair of the mole

on my ear could not be  
more pointedly  
employed

let all men confess it  
Gauguin or Van Gogh  
were intimates

who fell out finally  
and parted going  
to the ends of the earth

to be apart, wild men  
one of them cut  
his ear off with a pair of shears

which made him none the less  
a surpassing genius  
this happened

yesterday forgive him  
he was mad  
and who among us has retained

his sanity or balance  
in the course the  
events have taken since those days

Laurence Michel

## Shakespearean Tragedy: Critique of Humanism from the Inside

THE HOUSE OF TRAGEDY has many mansions—too many.<sup>1</sup> It is a noble and honorific house, and nearly everybody with ideological or aesthetic pretensions eventually tries to have it assigned as his official palace, the seat of his kingdom, the residence of his sovereign idea. Of the numerous aspirants, Humanism has been the longest and strongest contender: a whole book, and a powerfully argued and influential one, has been dedicated to the proposition that Sophocles (universally considered "central" in Greek tragedy) is concerned with celebrating Heroic Humanism;<sup>2</sup> and claims to a lease-hold on tragedy have been made most insistently and confidently under the banner of the Renaissance-bred variety usually called homocentric or anthropocentric humanism. Of late it is the Christian humanists who have annexed tragedy, as a central part of what G. K. Hunter calls "the tooling-up of the Shake-

<sup>1</sup> This essay was originally given as a lecture at the Catholic Renascence Society Symposium in 1958. Its title (I have tried in vain to pare it down) is, like the top of a wedge, much broader than its point, which is designedly thin because exploratory. Many large and hard questions about Shakespeare and aesthetics and tragedy are not so much begged (I trust) as finessed for the time being, awaiting the consequences of whatever penetration the point may attain.

<sup>2</sup> Cedric Whitman, *Sophocles: A Study of Heroic Humanism* (Cambridge, 1951).

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speare industry.”<sup>3</sup> So conservative and safe an anthologized set of “readings” of tragedy as those in Morris Weitz’s *Problems in Aesthetics*, which he thinks “represent adequately the major theories of tragedy”—Aristotle, Hume, Nietzsche, Hegel-Bradley, J. W. Krutch—assume overtly or tacitly that the Spirit of Man, the Human Spirit, *Homo Ethicus*, is autonomous and transcendent.

There has always been a difficulty, however, a paradox which dozens of ingenious attempts at resolution have failed to budge from its simple stubborn contradictoriness: tragedy tells of defeat, failure, loss, collapse, disaster; yet the spectator is uplifted, ennobled, elated, made to exult in, to be thankful for, to applaud the appalling spectacle. Everything humanistically worthwhile is blighted, then irretrievably cracked; men are made mad, and then destroyed; but “somehow” (and this word sooner or later makes its appearance) something called the Human Spirit has not only survived but prevailed: has been enhanced and raised to the triumphant power of heroic plenitude. “Somehow,” the principle of negation has, we are told, resulted in amplification; the more taken away, the more accumulates; the more death, the more life. The emperor, though naked, is resplendently clothed. Except for a few dissenters such as Rebecca West,<sup>4</sup> the otherwise rationalistic humanists accept the paradox without any seeming difficulty.

One perhaps usual cycle for the student of the genre to follow is to be initially contemptuous of the common-parlance and journalistic use of the word “tragedy” indiscriminately to

<sup>3</sup> See his review of Paul N. Siegel, *Shakespearian Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise*; Brents Sterling, *Unity in Shakespearian Tragedy*; and Harold S. Wilson, *On the Design of Shakespearian Tragedy*, in *Essays in Criticism*, IX (1959), 83-87. Elias Schwartz (“The Possibilities of Christian Tragedy,” *College English*, XXI [1960], 208-13) would have it that Hamlet achieves a state of “Christian resignation.” Voices are raised now and then against the chorus (notably Sylvan Barnet, “Some Limitations of a Christian Approach to Shakespeare,” *ELH*, XXII [1955], 82-92; and Arthur Sewell, *Character and Society in Shakespeare* [Oxford, 1951], 91-121), but they are in the minority.

<sup>4</sup> New York, 1959, p. 547.

<sup>5</sup> In *The Court and the Castle* (New Haven, 1957).

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describe, say, a highway accident, a stock-market crash, the death of a child, the failure to pass an examination; to dismiss the Monk's Tale definition<sup>6</sup> as simplistic and naive; then to suspect that perhaps these unsophisticated instincts are right in equating tragedy and disaster (it at least keeps one out of unresolved paradoxes); then to realize that the simple approach will not serve us fully, nonetheless. It is right and necessary as a beginning and a controlling emphasis, but it is ultimately inadequate to account for the other half of the paradox, which is a fact too: a catharsis does happen, and is ascertainable and demonstrable.

Somewhere along the line a shift takes place, often no doubt without the student's being aware of it. He begins to consider the audience, instead of the hero, or the theme, or the play, as recipient and beneficiary of the tragic action: it is the spectator who (somehow—the psychology of this is still being worked out) is endowed with pity and terror, purged of them, and dismissed in a state of quiet exhilaration.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, the world

<sup>6</sup> "Tragedy is to seyn a certeyn storie,  
As olde booke maken us memorie,  
Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee  
And is yfallen out of heigh degree  
Into myserie, and endeth wrecchedly.  
And they ben versified communely  
Of six feet, which men clepen *exametron*."

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle started it. He begins his discussion with "Tragedy, then, is . . ." and ends with what it putatively does: ". . . through pity and fear *effecting* the proper purgation of these emotions." Again, "every tragedy, therefore, must *have* six parts. . . . And these complete the list. . . . Recognition, as the name indicates, *is*. . . . This recognition, combined with Reversal, *will produce* either pity or fear; and actions producing these effects are those which, *by our definition*, Tragedy *represents*." Then, in the sequel to the definitive section, he picks up his gains: "The pleasure [of a double-plot tragedy] is not the *true* tragic pleasure. . . . for we must not demand of Tragedy any and every kind of pleasure, but only that which is *proper* to it. . . . And since the pleasure which the poet *should afford* is that which comes from pity and fear through imitation, it is evident that this quality must be impressed upon the incidents." (Cited from Weitz, 549-56; emphasis added.) It apparently only muddies the waters to bring one's metaphysics or ethics or psychology or sociology into one's aesthetics.

of the tragedy is a shambles, more of its central people than not are dead, mutilated, bereft, or mad, and those on its fringe are bewildered and cast down. An effect has been declared, without an adequate efficient cause; "affective" criteria have been smuggled into an "intentional" situation. It is a meretricious dexterity in logic or method, an illegitimate transfer from one set of references to another, like the shells and the pea. And the consequences can be destructive of the good estate of the art, producing a theory of tragedy which, as William F. Lynch points out, is "non-cognitive indeed":

the picture of *Oedipus* establishing a harmony in the conflict of human drives, as poor Oedipus himself collapses all over the place, seems quite funny.<sup>8</sup>

"What sort of artistic genre would it be," Nietzsche asked with well-founded alarm, "that derived from the idea of the spectator and crystallized itself in the mode of the 'pure' spectator? A spectator without drama is an absurdity."<sup>9</sup>

At all events, what we must make sure of is that we locate and identify the catharsis where it belongs: tragedy may or may not reach the heart of the beholder; it can be found in the heart of the play. The humanists say that humanism triumphs over limitation by making up, in the spirit, what it loses in the flesh (many would apparently put it: makes up in the audience what it loses in the play), and that we therefore rejoice.<sup>10</sup> This

<sup>8</sup> William F. Lynch, S.J., "The Evocative Symbol," *Thought*, XXIX (1955), 539.

<sup>9</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Francis Golffing (Garden City, 1956), 48-9.

<sup>10</sup> Maud Bodkin puts it succinctly: "The life-force which, in one manifestation, perishes, renews itself in another. So the tragic lament passes into exultation." (*Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* [London, 1934], 60.) Bradley is inspired to a prose antiphon by Othello's last words, ending with "and when he dies upon a kiss the most painful of all tragedies leaves us for the moment free from pain, and exulting in the power of 'love and man's unconquerable mind.'" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* [London, 1932], 198.) And J. W. Krutch: "... every real tragedy, however tremendous it may be, is an affirmation of faith in life, a declaration that even if God is not in his heaven, then at least Man is in his world." (*The Modern Temper* [New York, 1929], 125.)

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essay hopes to demonstrate that in the play humanism—life-force, spirit, flesh, and all—is defeated, and achieves only its *quietus*; and that we are reconciled to this by art.<sup>11</sup> Humanism is the subject of tragedy: in tragedy it is denounced and disowned, though with regret and with many a thrill of delighted applause, in passing; this is what is meant by a critique from the inside. Tragedy is a way of investigating the pretensions of humanism, and finding them to be indeed pretentious.

We are fortunate in having by now a considerable body of digested doctrine on the negative, extreme-oscillating, self-feeding, and skepticism-prone character of homocentric humanism, by critics and aestheticians as well as moralists; and likewise in having Herbert Weisinger's excellent summary of "The Attack on the Renaissance in Theology Today."<sup>12</sup> But Mr. Weisinger's aplomb in presenting so fully and scrupulously what he obviously doesn't take any stock in makes me wonder about the efficacy of this critique of humanism from the outside, as the "attack" might be called. With Coulton "exuberantly" devoting himself to exposing errors in the scholarship of the attackers;<sup>13</sup> and with the deans of our historical criticism maintaining that imperial Renaissance humanism is securely clothed in mediaeval Christian vestments; and with Bradleyan Shakespeareanism not only holding its own against both the disinte-

<sup>11</sup> It is here, of course, that all the affirmations about the humanistic *value* of art-tragedy (its beauty, solace, delight, compensation, even its communal, social, moral process and function) belong, and come into their own. There are any number of critical statements about "art that sorceress expert in healing" (as Nietzsche felicitously put it) which celebrate, without being quite able to explain, the miracle of the positive side of the paradox. But they must be subordinate clauses to the main predication of what tragedy is, or in terms of the action, what happens.

<sup>12</sup> *Studies in the Renaissance*, II (1955), 176-89. As exemplary of the "doctrine", I would add to Weisinger's bibliographical footnotes such studies as M. M. Mahood's *Poetry and Humanism*, and Hiram Haydn's *The Counter-Renaissance*; H. B. Parkes's "Nature's Diverse Laws," *Sewanee Review*, LVIII (1950) focuses on the Elizabethan Englishman; and R. W. Battenhouse, in "Hamlet's Apostrophe on Man: Clue to the Tragedy," *PMLA*, LXVI (1959) brings the position to bear on a single play.

<sup>13</sup> Weisinger, 188.

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grators and G. Wilson Knight, but breeding new syntheses and dialectical reconciliations at a steady rate—what with all this, Mr. Weisinger can well afford to see the attack on humanism as a rather amusing bit of theological asperity, explainable as a phenomenon of the “contemporary crisis of faith,” and not to be taken seriously as a threat. It would prove productive of more mutually intelligible disagreement, I should think, if one tried to enlist tragic poetry on one’s side from within, and on its own terms, that is, aesthetic ones. Among other advantages, such a procedure will allow the analyzing out and discussion of single and hence manageable “literary facts”—for in a work of art each part is a vehicle for the theme and can carry the burden of the action at least momentarily.

*Othello* suggests some openings. Eliot’s remark about Othello’s “cheering himself up” has been sometimes brushed off as another of his whimsical obiter dicta, which will doubtless be retracted in good time, and in good humor. I suggest that he is quite serious, and the context of his remark, leading from Medea to the Duchess of Malfi, contains a valuable hint. So far as I am aware, no one has made what would seem to be an inevitable comparison between the Duchess and Desdemona. Why is it that Bosola’s cynicism and Ferdinand’s bestial denigration of the Duchess are accepted (though with regret) as being at least founded in fact, while Iago’s “supersubtle Venetian” and Othello’s blackening of Desdemona are indignantly repudiated or explained away as quirks of their speaker’s psychology? Because, I daresay, Webster can be safely categorized as Jacobean, cynical, ghoulish, post-high-Renaissance-decadent, and so forth; whereas Shakespeare must be maintained as the *defensor fidei humanisticae*. Yet what does the play *Othello* say about Desdemona, Othello, and their love? It says that they fall in love, with themselves alone as the cause, take the fruits of their love in despite of all sanctions to the contrary, set up their love as sovereign and autonomous; and that Othello’s nobility and Desdemona’s innocence find no defences against motiveless malignancy, become duped and corrupted, and are destroyed. Where is the rebirth, the resuscitation, *in the play*?

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Desdemona's, at all events, is futile and confused and self-contradictory: she is not even as self-aware and self-assured as the Duchess of Malfi. Here indeed is welter and collapse.

It still seems necessary to make some comment on the language used by Shakespearean tragic characters—"grace," "gracious," "heavenly," "angelic," and so on—for it is still (in spite of Santayana and several others) being picked up by the commentators and applied, from *their* "Christian" context, to the characters. There was a time, perhaps, when one could answer this approach by pointing out that if you are going to call Emilia's "O, the more angel she, / And you the blacker devil," "O she was heavenly true!" Christian, you must do the same for Cleopatra's "O heavenly mingle!"; but the Christianizers are starting to adopt even *Antony and Cleopatra*. Let it be simply asserted, then: "heaven" and "heavenly" are, to both Othello and Desdemona, figures of speech; expletives; superlatives to apply to themselves, each other, and their love. This vocabulary is not admissible evidence for the claim that the ethos of the play is more than homocentric humanism. The Duchess of Malfi and Cariola are much more specifically "Christian" than are Desdemona and Emilia; if the former are to be seen as exhibiting the "tragic flaw" of Renaissance humanism, and as being responsible, at least partially, for their own destruction, then Desdemona is even less entitled to lip-service redemption and absolution. Iago was right: "Bless'd fig's end!" "Bless'd pudding!"

The real difficulty, I believe, is that humanistic critics cannot bear to think at all badly of heroes and heroines they identify themselves with, that they want the thrills, the power, of tragedy without its cost to their self-esteem. But again, what does tragedy say? It says that *loss* of self is the constant; that lust (power-lust as well as sexual desire) is the *expense* of spirit in a waste of shame. It is epic, or romance, or "Happy Warrior"-type odic poetry that shows self-founded and self-regarding virtue triumphant. The play *Othello* gives full opportunity for self-sanctioned love to sustain both itself and a world—it brings forth its music, constrains the admiration and

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assent of society, outlasts a storm of nature; and, as soon as it is left to its own devices, sovereign and autonomous in its island, it falters and cracks and festers and goes down to ignominious destruction. Othello's big speech near the beginning of Act II contains the key word—Desdemona is his soul's joy, and his soul, he says, "hath her content so *absolute* / That not another comfort like to this / Succeeds in unknown fate." "Perdition catch my soul," he says in Act III, "But I do love thee! And when I love thee not, / Chaos is come again." Another lover was to be ready to give his soul to perdition if his love should be lost; for, Adam says to Raphael,

when I approach  
Her loveliness, so *absolute* she seems  
And in herself complete, so well to know  
Her own, that what she wills to do or say  
Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best.  
.... and, to consummate all,  
Greatness of mind and nobleness their seat  
Build in her loveliest, and create an awe  
About her, as a guard angelic placed.

(P.L., VIII, 550-60)

At this, Raphael's brow contracts; but there is no one (except Iago) to make faces at Othello. Chaos comes indeed, in both stories; but *Paradise Lost* is an epic, and implies the Christian ethos of redemption; *Othello* is a tragedy, and there is no atonement, vicarious or otherwise. Humanism, under the aegis of absolute love, has been radically criticized.

While eschewing Bradley's and Mrs. Jameson's lyric homage, no one wants to withhold "the pity of it" from Desdemona, or the humanistic admiration she elicits—nor has Shakespeare done so. The point is merely that Desdemona's wifeliness is her whole moral being, and that it proves inadequate. Her defeat is complete; even in death she preserves no identity. Indeed, in this mode she fits, becomes the vehicle for, the tragic action: for tragedy requires loss of self, and Desdemona's self-hood is the embodiment of innocence—innocence so confident that it indeed becomes super-subtle. We say that in tragedy the dream

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of innocence is confronted by the fact of guilt, and acquiesces therein;<sup>14</sup> and this is especially true of Desdemona. Rebecca West's interpretation of Ophelia's destruction is biased by her concern with the "court" as the villain, but her insight can lead us to a complementary understanding here: "Shakespeare thought it one of the worst offenses of the court that by the time the innocents were massacred, they were no longer innocent."<sup>15</sup> We have to make mutations for the court idea and for Desdemona's original state as different from Ophelia's; but Desdemona can be seen as ineluctably pathetic, and consequently not possibly a champion, or even a martyr, for that matter, of the human spirit. To borrow for a moment Bradley's "might have been" exegetical technique, we might say that *had* Desdemona started off meek and ended defiant in death, she "would have been" such a champion; but the play says the opposite: she begins as husband-maker, becomes the idolater of her own creation (she wonders whether any women could abuse, sin against, their *husbands*, not against that which Iago has accurately described as "sanctimony and a frail vow"); she wavers between protest and craven fear, between self-justification and allegiance to her "kind lord"; and, if we may apply a formal criterion for a moment, she achieves that aesthetic evening-out and realization of the one-ness of action which is the hallmark of tragic art:

Who has done this deed?

Nobody. I myself. Farewell.

Desdemona, in her movement from active to passive, has carried her part of the tragedy of humanism-in-love. She must not

<sup>14</sup> This is a working formula, necessarily abstract to cover as many varieties as possible. I have filled in some of the implications of its terms in "The Possibility of a Christian Tragedy," *Thought*, XXXI (1956), 405-6. Lest anyone think that I believe Desdemona to be actually guilty of adultery or infidelity, let me hasten to say that "guilt" in this context has a much wider denotation. See Max Scheler, "On the Tragic," *Cross Currents*, IV (1954), 178-91.

<sup>15</sup> *The Court and the Castle*, 22.

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be transported to heaven, enski'd and sainted; not even the whitest woman is an angel to tragedy.

Character, motive, intrigue, diction are given full play—every rift is loaded with ore; but to no avail. *Othello* makes a shambles out of an extremely promising edifice of the human spirit, and no amount of plastering at the very end can cover up the erosion and corrosion which the hero himself has, in his "dirt-ignorance," abetted the spirit of evil in effecting. Shakespeare does provide the cheering-up speech—why not? *Othello* too must come the full aesthetic circle, and this is neatly parallel to the *Othello* of Act I. The humanists, who have had meagre rations of gratification, by virtue of self-identification with the noble Moor, since early in Act II, fall upon the speech, orchestrate it even more, and resolve all compunctions in its cheerful, eye-and-ear filling, synaesthetic finale. (The same thing can be observed in readings of the last act of *Hamlet*: one begins to get worried; then, Ah, here it comes at last! Divinity shaping ends, Providence, and flights of angels.) But this euphoria will not stand analysis; Eliot has not been refuted, even by Santayana. And Bradley's stubborn critical integrity forced him to write Note O,<sup>16</sup> which is worth quoting in full:

### OTHELLO ON DESDEMONA'S LAST WORDS

I have said that the last scene of *Othello*, though terribly painful, contains almost nothing to diminish the admiration and love which heighten our pity for the hero. I said 'almost' in view of the following passage (v.ii.123 ff.):

- E. O, who hath done this deed?
- D. Nobody; I myself. Farewell.
- Commend me to my kind lord: O, farewell! [dies]
- O. Why, how should she be murder'd?
- E. Alas, who knows?
- O. You heard her say herself, it was not I.
- E. She said so: I must needs report the truth.
- O. She's a liar, gone to burning hell:  
'Twas I that kill'd her.

<sup>16</sup> Pp. 438-9.

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E.                   O, the more angel she,  
                  And you the blacker devil!  
O. She turn'd to folly, and she was a whore.

This is a strange passage. What did Shakespeare mean us to feel? One is astonished that Othello should not be startled, nay thunderstruck, when he hears such dying words coming from the lips of an obdurate adulteress. One is shocked by the moral blindness or obliquity which takes them only as a further sign of her worthlessness. Here alone, I think, in the scene sympathy with Othello quite disappears. Did Shakespeare mean us to feel thus, and to realize how completely confused and perverted Othello's mind had become? I suppose so: and yet Othello's words continue to strike me as very strange, and also as not *like* Othello,—especially as at this point he was not in anger, much less enraged. It has sometimes occurred to me that there is a touch of personal animus in the passage. One remembers the place in *Hamlet* (written but a little while before) where Hamlet thinks he is unwilling to kill the King at his prayers, for fear they may take him to heaven; and one remembers Shakespeare's irony, how he shows that those prayers do *not* go to heaven, and that the soul of this praying murderer is at that moment as murderous as ever, just as here the soul of the lying Desdemona is angelic *in* its lie. Is it conceivable that in both passages he was intentionally striking at conventional "religious" ideas; and, in particular, that the belief that a man's everlasting fate is decided by the occupation of his last moment excited in him indignation as well as contempt? I admit that this fancy seems un-Shakespearean, and yet it comes back on me whenever I read this passage. (The words "I suppose so" [above] gave my conclusion; but I wish to withdraw the whole Note.)

"Un-Shakespearean" as it might be, here is a literary fact pointing to the possibility of Shakespeare's having an animus, being ironical towards his own creation, even building "indignation and contempt" into his tragedies by imputing a "contemptible" belief to his own heroes. It bothered Bradley—he did not want to believe it—he wanted to think it only a fancy—he wished to withdraw the whole note—and then reprinted wish, note, and all! This is a remarkable demonstration both of critical conscience and of the stubborn faculty of tragedy's naked

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core to shuck off accretions, and display itself in its true form and feature.

Let us turn to *Hamlet* for another brief analysis. Miss West has done a service, in the early chapters of *The Court and the Castle*, for anyone who wishes to assume a "tough Prince" rather than a "sweet Prince" ethos for the play. I should like to endorse and adopt her view (without the court-society thesis), and propose one or two interpretations of crucial passages, which seem to me to follow from this general position. The syntax and the rhetoric of the great soliloquy require that, to Hamlet, "to be" and "to suffer" are equivalent, whereas "not to be" is to act: *take arms, end* troubles, die. "To be" involves *bearing*: whips and scorns, fardels, those ills we know; "not to be" is a *consummation, ending* heart-ache, *shuffling* of the coil, *making* one's quietus with a bare bodkin, *flying* to ills we know not of. Here is the puzzling paradox of that nobility in the mind which is humanism's highest criterion: one achieves fullness of being—that is, self-hood—by patience, not agency; even that negative kind of action, going to sleep, reduces one's essential being. *Hamlet* is the tragedy of humanism-as-nobility-in-the-mind, the paradigm of its necessary self-defeat.

Hamlet answers his question—he finds that it is nobler to suffer than to act—all through the last act of the play by adopting an *attitude* (remember Othello's cheering himself up) appropriate to this built-in defeatism. He insists on the modesty and likelihood of his tracing of Alexander's dust to a bunghole; he breaks off "opposing" Laertes in the grave with "—but it is no matter. / Let Hercules himself do what he may; / The cat will mew and dog will have his day." And again, "how ill all's here about my heart. But it is no matter." "What is't to leave betimes. Let be." "O, I could tell you—But let it be." "The rest is silence." No matter; let be; the readiness is *all*. Not ripeness; and readiness in what respect? Self-sufficiency, under the aspect of non-responsibility, the acceptance of can-cellings-out, the spectatorial attitude. Articulated, this becomes the logical plenitude of a program of being-as-suffering, of which silence and death are the proper felicity. It is a program

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moving towards, and adoptive of, such states and ideals as skepticism, cynicism, nihilism, stoicism, solipsism; Death-in-Life and Life-in-Death.

I have said that this was Hamlet's program, during the last act—the “purpose” phase of this last “agon”, in Fergusson's terminology—not that he achieves it in its finality until the very end (as Lear, too, keeps finding that there is more to renounce, more buttons to undo, right up to the collapse). Each of the statements quoted above, except the last, is either a question, an argument, or an imperative—or an impatient shrug—not an affirmation; and they are provoked each time by pressures brought on Hamlet to backslide in his progress towards inactivity: this is his “passion”. It follows (if this general ethos of the fifth act is accepted) that not only mouthing and ranting—purposes that follow the king's pleasure—and other spasmodic activities should be purged away, but also the very intellectual, rational, humanistic control of one's actions and being. Hence we see what I take to be the cynicism and irony behind Hamlet's remarks about both the divinity that shapes ends (no matter what we try to do about it) and the providence in the fall of sparrows. Rashness and indiscretion work when rationalism fails (surely a bitter admission for a humanist)—and that is what should “learn us there's a divinity”; augury (the mind's misgiving, the capacity to anticipate the future) is defied, repudiated—and that should “learn” us that there's a providence. Skepticism and fideism are complementary, not polar; and both are the tragic mausoleum of rational, or even aesthetic, humanism.

King Lear is too unwieldy to deal with adequately in this context, but an indication might be given how it could tolerate the general approach. The play's big question (central structurally too, like Hamlet's soliloquy—in the third act) extrapolates from the humanistic to the macrocosmic: “Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?” That is, is there a principle of negation, nothingness, in Nature herself that corresponds to hardness of heart (the vision of humanistic evil) in man? The answer is, apparently, yes: the state of things on

earth seems to mirror the "promised [that is, threatened] end" of all things, an "image" of cosmic "horror". But what of compensation, access of knowledge, balm for lacerated human pride? Edgar, Kent, Albany at the end stand around making futile gestures and despairing speeches. Cordelia has learned nothing: she still boasts that she can outfrown false fortune, and is eager to confront "these daughters and these sisters" so she can tongue-lash them again; but Lear is exasperated with her obtuseness: "No, no, no, no!" She, poor fool, is ignominiously stifled of life at last. Certainly, Lear himself has learned great secrets, the very mystery of things, but they are not viable for, or available to, man or his society: they are "prisoners" truths, damning intelligence *against* man, gleaned by "God's spies". "Upon such sacrifices" as have been made, willingly or unwillingly, by everybody in the play (Lear himself "hath borne most") the "gods themselves throw incense" which might well be grateful to *their* nostrils, but which is acrid and stultifying to man. Nor does Lear's new knowledge calm him, or satiate him, or bring him to either peace or exultation: his enormous vitality keeps him fighting his renunciation right up to the very end, and his quietus is that of the exhaustion succeeding an explosion—nothing has indeed come. Othello goes out with a speech and a gesture, Hamlet with a whimper, Lear with a bang. But after all of them, the rest is silence.

I do not have a complete and self-sufficient theory behind these interpretations. As of now, I am persuaded of two desiderata: meaning must be arrived at through, and within, form;<sup>17</sup> and the catharsis must be found, if at all, in terms of "the play's body." The great sign of a successful work of art is poise, quiet, equilibrium; it is an equation, that which remains after antagonistic elements have been matched or paid off or cancelled out. That is why we say, for example, that at the end the hero realizes, knows himself; achieves his essence; is equated to the gods, or is equal to the occasion. To cite H. A. Myers' persuasive theory of the complementariness of good and

<sup>17</sup> I follow H. D. F. Kitto, *Form and Meaning in Drama* (London, 1956) here, in his general idea, if not all the way through his reading of Shakespeare.

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evil in the world: "Each tragedy deals with a specific evil and its relation to the concomitant good."<sup>18</sup> His idea of justice as the equality of good and evil mixed according to the individual's capacity for experiencing is particularly helpful when we deal with tragedies that use a hero as vehicle for the action; but I should enter a caveat. "Justice" as employed here is the wrong word (Myers was primarily an "ethician," a moralist)—it should be "justness"—exactness. Likewise, "good and evil," moral values, are certainly among the data of tragedy, but do not constitute its form: that achieves itself in terms of equal-or-unequal, right-or-wrong (in the sense of adequate, up to the mark); and when the aesthetic stasis is illustrated through the state of being arrived at by the hero, it is a question of psychological, not ethical or moral, values—or moral only in the Wordsworthian psychological sense. Innocence and guilt, then, are referable to the conditions of what Arthur Koestler calls freedom and destiny—"the freedom of the whole is the destiny of the part";<sup>19</sup> and what tragedy does to "make the heavens more just" is to bring the ideal of freedom into congruence with destiny. Dante could say "*In His will is our peace*"; the tragic hero must somehow make his peace with Will.

One finds that when it seems Aristotle has been finally discredited on Tragedy (as indeed shrewd blows have been struck), something yet remains to preserve his claim to central insights. I have two things left which have survived the attrition: Euripides as "the most tragic of the poets" *because* he was pessimistic about man's moral or ethical powers; and the plot as decisive in the action. I take this last to mean that regardless of either "character" or "values" (with which, when they exemplify the Human Spirit, we are so prone to ally ourselves), *what happens is what counts*. And, as we said at the beginning, defeat is what happens in a tragedy. So the plot may be said to criticize the pretensions of humanism; and since the plot is the very soul of the action, this is a critique from

<sup>18</sup> *Tragedy: a View of Life* (Ithaca, 1956), 9.

<sup>19</sup> *The Yogi and the Commissar* (New York, 1946), 218-32.

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the inside. Myers says, "Great drama itself is not an adverse criticism of the way of heroes";<sup>20</sup> but I suggest that tragic poetry provides us with an "inverse" (as analogous to inscape, instress) criticism of humanism by virtue of plot.

Not plot alone, by any means of course. These are poems, in the large sense—everything must serve the economy and decorum of the whole—so naturally in the great and successful ones the plot cannot fight the character: and if we find ourselves thinking that this is not so—that Desdemona did not "deserve" her degradation, that Cordelia should not die, that Hamlet would have been able to cope with Othello's problem and vice versa—then we should try to revise our conception of the character (or re-examine the syntax, or re-make patterns of imagery, etc.) rather than the other way round. Again, the catharsis is to be sought within the play, not in the audience, and in terms of aesthetic states. Having made our minds up to this, we can then search in each case for the precise (that is, poetic) qualities proper to the state of ripeness or readiness each character has purged himself in preparation for. I put forward this reading of tragedy with the fewer misgivings since (as will now begin to be visible) it should enlist the still powerful and appealing support of the critics of the School of Irony. A tragedy is a metaphysical poem on humanism.

Lest this *pro-tempore* insistence on the sufficiency of tragedy seem overly protestatious, I would mention my awareness of considerations like these: the tragic view, like the "metaphysical" view, is not the only, or the truest, or the most inclusive view of life; tragedy has an enormous range (from the epigram to *King Lear*), and exhibits many degrees of depth and reach and reverberation into realms beyond the human spirit; within tragic poetry itself there are degrees of successful rigor in criticizing humanism from within: Marlowe as inferior to Shakespeare; Shakespeare's tragi-comedies and frontier tragedies as compared with the three major ones. What I should like to say is that tragedy seems to be the one form and attitude

<sup>20</sup> P. 141.

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which copes with the powerful dynamics of humanism internally and integrally. The epic is one-sidedly laudatory and patriotic; satire or polemic "attacks" humanism from without and on the periphery; low comedy evades the issue and continually tends towards musical comedy bathos; high comedy (where, as in Dante, the human does reach toward the divine) must perforce consign high humanism to Limbo. Only tragedy can deal adequately with humanism on its high horse. Is it too sanguine to hope that it might work the other way too—that we might move towards a definition of tragedy in terms of humanism?

To enlist one final set of terms in such an enterprise, then, I suggest that the Affective Fallacy is much more invidious to any approach to integral definition of forms than is the Intentional. Regardless of the degree of consciousness, intention at least operates in the area between artist and artifact, and therefore points towards the thing as it is or becomes. Affectiveness springs into the free area between artifact and myriad response, and the chances are that control will pass to the constant urge in the consumer to feed his own image and likeness. Tragedy preeminently among the forms has been saddled from the beginning with an outside criterion: the pity and terror excited in or elicited from the audience. This is improper, and is an accident of Aristotle's prevailing ethicism and psychologism; and we might more profitably explore the "intentional" elements in our efforts at definition, or description, or interpretation.

Shakespeare "had something in mind," "had something to say," in writing *Hamlet*. We do not deny him an attitude when we examine the sonnets or *Venus and Adonis*: it is only that other hoary quarter-truth, the putative "objectivity" of the dramatic vehicle, that requires shutting our eyes to the fact that creative artists are not automata. Nor does it advance the critical question to have recourse to the "Others abide our question. / Thou art free" gambit, as did Thornton Wilder in a recent interview:

The theatre is supremely fitted to say: "Behold! these things are...." Yet most dramatists employ it to say: "This moral truth can be learned

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from beholding this action." . . . Only in Shakespeare are we freed from hearing axes ground.<sup>21</sup>

The axes are there in Shakespeare as well as in any other literary work; the only difference is that we do not hear them being ground because he sharpens them against each other, edge to thin edge, not edge against a rough non-aesthetic grindstone. And so it is that humanism (which is the subject of tragedy) wears *itself* away to nothingness, with the help of that abrasive that looks like a lubricant, that diamond-dust suspended in spermaceti, which we call poetry. If we are consoled by the spectacle of humanism destroyed, it is because the destruction has been controlled and expressed at all points from within, and accomplished in its own terms.

Who has done this deed?

Nobody. I myself. Farewell.

Commend me to my kind lord. O, farewell.

<sup>21</sup> *New York Times Book Review*, May 12, 1957.

# Claire McAllister

## SNOWY MORNING

I awoke this morning to a world snowing wonders,  
Throwing flakes of delight over every bleak twig  
And the daybreak blue flooding the windows as thunders  
Spell dumb; and streetlamps like chandeliers lit.  
Snowy each sprout, pebble, brown reed, snowladen;  
I looked to the white-shouldered sky: swathed in lace!  
Saw a telegraph-wire because it went straight,  
But couldn't have told it from treelimb's grace  
Except for the line . . .

O disguise so our fate! O  
Snow falling down on our days near the Day,  
Disguise with white wishes our days in the face  
Of the Day, as its Child sees nor richrobes nor rags  
But, as snowy day, knows not the rosebed from sands,  
But covers with love, like a snowy sky, all.

And the sun walking over the trees like a bride  
And the trailings of rice-throwing snowclouds, and high  
Beaded pools in the woodlands were brimming champagnes.  
Was the world white and gold? It was new, that cold breeze.  
Then arise from the sheets and go over sleet fields  
To marry the day, for a day. Pledge be sealed.

## *Harold Witt*

### THE SNOW PRINCE

Antlered fantastic, from stalactite frost,  
the deer drawn snow prince on a sleigh of ice,  
in diamond black, a whip lithe at his wrist  
lashes his pallid prancers out of the north.

Gorgeous auroras behind him, blankness before,  
he glides over ice with a lightness, a grace of ballet,  
the snowflake weightless balance of skater or skier,  
as whiteness wings from the runners a feathery spray.

He glissandos through snowheavy winter slim on his sleigh,  
his eyes as he passes burn blue with circles of black  
and a demon grin gleams in his racing face  
as he flips at the steaming reindeer the whip's crack crack,

as, Oh, down naphthalene slopes from an iceblue sky  
slicing the snow as he comes with a terrible track,  
he slides like a blade of wind in his swanshaped sleigh  
and his antlers are ice in the wind, icicle bright.

A white hawk lifts from their branches, spreads on the air  
a width of terror, a black hawk shadow on snow.  
The glittering prince speeds on faster and faster,  
the bit-hurt reindeer bleed as they blurringly go.

And on through the months of crystal, the landscape of loss,  
he leaves, as he lashes, traces of blood on the snow  
until in a tilting light, his ice sleigh slows  
and all his jeweled power melts to grass.

## TRUTH IS A ZOO

Truth is a park, a zoo  
we amble through to peer  
at laughter's kangaroo,  
at all-too-human bear,

island of monkeys, who,  
in worried families hang  
from comic tails, and cute-  
ly swing from branch to ring,

seals whose passion, fish,  
enables them to toot  
horns, flap fins, and flash  
balls from snout to snout.

It's swans that ride like pride  
with supercilious necks,  
a peacock, who, for his bride,  
spreads his clattering spots.

If wolves, we're glad for bars,  
and most at dinnertime  
when beasts with teeth like ours  
tear reason out of bone.

And there where growls and stripes  
prowl the tiger's den  
we recognize our lives  
pacing in anxious skin.

## A CLOWN

He was a clown like any other one,  
hackneyed as Harlequin or Pantaloons,  
white faced, wheel cheeked, sad inside.  
His stockinginged head, his thin lips painted wide,  
the pratfall, tramp hat comedy he played  
(trick cigar exploding to bouquet),  
a Pagliacci usual disguise  
hid the tragic figure that he was.

At tomfool distance, ridiculously gloved,  
a monkey's uncle gleeful children loved,  
toppling off tightrope; as the tandem slid  
longer and longer, the one puffing behind—  
in leering mirrors making up his mind  
for the last act, the bloodred laugh of life  
drawn across illusion to his ears  
while all the while reality dripped tears.

And so guffawing after the elephant stunts  
and in between the flights of acrobats,  
we watched him blunder in ballooning pants,  
x-eyed fall guy, man without a chance,  
and roared like Romans when a lion (patched)  
chased and ate him, then, six legged, danced—  
though for a moment in that sawdust place  
we saw a death skull gape in funnyface.

*Renato Poggiali*

## The Autumn of Ideas

THESE PAGES form the third chapter of a work in progress by the same title, which takes for its own subject the idea of decadence as reinterpreted in the modern Western world. Another chapter, which will be part of the book's closing section, has already appeared separately in print, under the title "Qualis Artifex Pereo! or Barbarism and Decadence," in *Harvard Library Bulletin*, XIII (Winter, 1959), 135-159; it deals with the single constant of the idea of decadence, which is historical in character. This constant is identical with a view of the historical process based on the dialectics of civilization and barbarism, on the antithesis (which often tends to become the synthesis) of decadence and primitivism. As for the excerpt printed below, it deals with the main variant of the same idea, which is the literary one. The theme of the pages that follow is more precisely the development of the modern notion of "decadent literature," a notion which emerges when the epithet in that formula ceases to be, as previously it has always been, wholly derogatory in temper, and acquires an ambiguous meaning, in which praise and blame seem to mix.

I believe that the chapter here printed is comprehensible in itself, even in the not too obscure references to points already made in the preceding section of the manuscript. The book's first chapter surveys the idea of decadence as conceived within the classical tradition, which treats that idea as the outright negation of its own central myth. Such a myth is that of the "golden ages" of culture, on which that tradition based its absolute norms, and from which it drew standards for all judgments of value. The second chapter rehearses the sudden apparition and the rapid growth of the modern idea of decadence from both historicism and Romanticism. Historicism replaced the myth of the "golden ages" with the affirmation of the significance of every epoch, at whatever segment of history's curve it might be located; and by doing so it made it possible

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to see progress even in regress. Romanticism developed many myths of its own, some of which anticipated the modern idea of decadence in a strange combination of historical and psychological elements. Such was certainly the case with the mythical type of the *enfant du siècle*, of the man who feels at once *in* and *out* of tune with "the spirit of the age," who, in Musset's words, has come all too late into a world all too old. The rest of the book analyzes many other variants of the idea of decadence, including the physiological one, which parallels Baudelaire's "autumn of ideas" with Yeats' "autumn of the flesh"; or studies a few special aspects of the general problem, chiefly from aesthetic and cultural standpoints. The most important of such aspects are the cult of artificiality; the complex ties of decadent art with Naturalism and Symbolism; finally, the paradoxical tendency on the part of the decadent artist to seek both sublimation and agony in that advance-guard which seems to embody at once his nightmares and his daydreams.

### I

HERE IS NO doubt that the literary ideology which ruled European culture at the end of the nineteenth century, during the *fin du siècle* par excellence, was essentially based on a conscious identification of decadence and modernism. The truth of this is self-evident in France; as for other countries, sufficient is the example of Germany, where decadent art often took the name of *Jugendstil*. Yet some of the most extreme versions of that identification occurred in Russia and Spain, or rather, Latin America: in brief, at the opposite ends of the cultural spectrum of the West. In Russia the connection between those two concepts was for instance clearly conveyed in that manifesto which Dimitri Merezhkovski published in 1893 under the long heading *On the Causes of the Present Decline and On the New Currents of Contemporary Russian Literature*. There, as the pamphlet's title indicates, its author joined together, as complementing rather than opposing each other, the otherwise unrelated ideas of the decay of the old and of the emergence of the new. As for Spain and Hispanic America, Enrique Anderson Imbert thus described in his recent *Historia de la literatura hispano-americana* (p. 271) the situation which

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obtained there when the great modern and decadent poet Rubén Darío finally appeared on the literary horizon:

Yet at this time "moderns" and "modernists" go through the air of America and Spain confused with "parnassians," "symbolists," "decadents," "aesthetes," "new ones," "reformists," "ultrareformists" . . . Darío finally chooses the term "modernism" and transforms it to designate the name of the movement of the young, as well as the American contribution to the artistic revolution of the Spanish tongue.<sup>1</sup>

The student of *fin du siècle* culture is well aware of this fact, yet he must never forget that the suggestion that decadence and modernity might well be one and the same thing had been originally advanced, a few generations earlier, not by the supporters and the advocates, but by the critics and the adversaries of modernism.

From its very beginnings modernism had been generally considered, particularly in France, as being related to the Romantic movement; and it had been even viewed as its direct offspring. Nothing more natural than this: the Romantics, who even now are not too infrequently considered as the most recent manifestation, although unique in quality and extreme in intensity, of the two-centuries-old controversy between the "ancients" and the "moderns," were by definition, at least for their own time, the representatives of a new aesthetic outlook. The validity of such a claim could not be denied even by their attempt (later to be imitated by their decadent successors) to justify themselves by appealing to the past—in their case, especially to the Middle Ages.

Some of the critics of the Romantics chose to refer them to other traditions: thus, in his *Tableau de la poésie française au seizième siècle*, Sainte-Beuve found it fit to compare them, in a sympathetic mood, to those poets of the *Pléiade* whom

<sup>1</sup> "Pero ahora 'modernos,' 'modernistas,' andan por el aire de América y de España mezclados con 'parnasianos,' 'simbolistas,' 'decadentes,' 'estetas,' 'nuevos,' 'reformistas,' 'ultrareformistas' . . . Darío se decide por la palabra 'modernismo' y la convierte en el nombre del movimiento juvenil y del aporte de América a la revolución artística en lengua española."

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Boileau had condemned as unpolished and immature artists. In their search for the ideal precedents of Romanticism other critics, far less favorably inclined, were soon to turn to models and precedents never considered before. Thus Désiré Nisard, one of the most steadfast enemies of Romanticism, wrote his once famous book, *La littérature romaine de la décadence*, also for the special purpose of drawing a parallel between Lamartine, Musset, and Hugo, and the poets of the silver and bronze ages of Latin letters. Nisard was a classicist, and the parallel he drew was meant to be unfair to either group. Yet his is perhaps the first attempt to apply the decadent label to a modern, or contemporary, poetic school; and it matters very little that the moderns are in this case the Romantics of the thirties rather than the literary figures of the following generation. It matters hardly more that Nisard's parallel ultimately ends in a broader and more inclusive opposition between ancient and modern decadents on one side, and the classical masters, Latin and French, of the Augustan age and of the century of Louis XIV, on the other. What really matters is simply that this comparison was an invidious one.

The successors of Nisard and his peers, those who at mid-century accused the new generation of decadence, were, if not identical with, at least spiritually akin to, the men who had taken the side of the "classics" in the controversy about Romanticism. The truth of this may be seen in a testimonial by Ernest Renan, which may be found in *L'Avenir de la Science*, and which refers to the contemporary scene as it had appeared to the author at the time he had composed that book. The testimonial may be dated also through internal evidence, by its closing allusion to a current brand of "eclecticism," which could not but be that of the philosopher Cousin:

There are people who like to point out, in the literature and philosophy of our time, the traits that recall the decadence of Greece and Rome, and who hence draw the conclusion that the modern spirit, after having reached (as they claim) its age of flowering in the seventeenth century, is now declining, and slowly proceeds toward its own extinction. Our poets remind them of Statius and Silius Italicus; our thinkers, of

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Porphyrius and Proclus; the series being on either side closed by eclecticism. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Renan seals his testimonial not only by denying any historical or scientific validity to the parallel, but also by casting some doubt on the philosophical value of the notion of decadence, which he finds a highly equivocal concept:

True critics, however, deal as discreetly as possible with the term decadence, which is a very deceitful one. . . .<sup>3</sup>

Such an attitude, more sceptical than negative, was natural on the part of a man who was less of a *littérateur* and more of a *savant*. Yet at first the men of letters of the new generation reacted not too differently to their elders' attempt to impose on them the label of "decadents," although shortly after they suddenly reversed their attitude. There is nothing strange in their earlier response: what may look strange is that initially they reacted no less negatively, or at least dubiously, toward the far less controversial label of modernism.

If the *enfant du siècle* had felt himself to be at once the child and the stepchild of his age, the writer who was later to be called decadent likewise felt at once in step and out of step with his time. This meant in practice that he could not accept all the moral, social, and cultural values of his social and historical milieu. Many of such values, especially those which can be summed up with such words as democracy and industrialism, were anathema to him, while they were worshipped by Monsieur Homais and his peers, by those triumphant Philistines whom the modern artist, from that generation on, has always viewed as a plague and a curse. It was as a protest against such

<sup>2</sup> "Certaines personnes se plaisent à relever les traits qui, dans notre littérature et notre philosophie, rappellent la décadence grecque et romaine, et en tirent cette conclusion, que l'esprit moderne, après avoir eu (disent-elles) son époque brillante au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, déchoit et va s'éteignant peu à peu. Nos poètes leur rappellent Stace et Silius Italicus; nos philosophes Porphyre et Proclus; l'éclectisme, des deux côtés, close la série. . . ."

<sup>3</sup> "Mais les vrais critiques n'emploient qu'avec une extrême réserve ce mot si trompeur de décadence. . . ."

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values and the classes of men upholding them that many decadents chose in politics and religion the path of reactionary Catholicism. Yet, despite this sense of revulsion, the decadent found much which attracted him in modern life. There was even a method in his madness, a logic in his likes and dislikes. The rationale of the contradictory attitudes of the decadent mind toward modern life is simply that it would loathe all modern things of which the bourgeois spirit would approve, while greeting enthusiastically all those which that spirit would reject or deny. The earliest decadents, however, realized soon enough that the bourgeois spirit was conservative in matters of art, in the very domain where they wanted reform, change, and revolution itself. And it was this realization that turned so many of the writers and artists of the second half of the nineteenth century into prophets of aesthetic modernism.

A similar shift quickly took place in their attitude toward the notion of decadence. The very fact that the first to define the new aesthetic trends as an "art" or a "literature of decadence" had been the enemies of all innovation and experiment, initially led the representatives of the new tendencies to reject those designations as libelous, or, at least, as meaningless. This is what Baudelaire seems at first to have done in a passage from his "Notes nouvelles sur Edgar A. Poë," which he published in 1852 as a preface to the second volume of his translations of that writer's tales. The passage is interesting also because it reveals Baudelaire's awareness that all those who were indicting modern writing as "decadent" belonged to the same breed of the men who one generation earlier had attacked Romanticism as a denial of classical tradition, and, therefore, of all aesthetic values:

Decadent literature! Empty words which we often hear falling, with the resounding echo of an emphatic yawn, from the lips of those sphynxes without riddle who watch the sacred gates of classical aesthetics!\*

\* "Littérature de décadence! Paroles vides que nous sentons souvent tomber, avec la sonorité d'un bâillement emphatique, de la bouche de ces sphynx sans énigme qui veillent les portes saintes de l'esthétique classique!"

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At a later time, however, the new artists and writers replaced this reaction with a contrary one. Instead of rejecting that insulting label, they accepted and even welcomed it as a feather in their cap. In brief, they changed what was meant as an offensive designation into a mark of distinction, into a proud and noble flag. Such a reevaluation of the name obviously implied a transvaluation of the thing. It is by this paradoxical metamorphosis of the notion of decadence into a new, ideal value that some of the new artists and writers challenged the world at large in their turn. Baudelaire seems to have been almost ready to do so in the very text from which we have taken the previous passage. This is what he had to say in one of the sentences immediately following the statement already quoted:

Some poetic temperaments may well find novel delights in the light effects of a moribund sun.<sup>5</sup>

Baudelaire states this view in hypothetical rather than in categorical terms, while speaking not as an original creator but as the reflective interpreter of another poet. Thus by "novel delights" he may simply mean his own discovery of strange and suggestive qualities in the work of a past innovator, now dead. Nor can we forget that in this passage Baudelaire looks at decadence, so to say, from the outside, from the standpoint of literary criticism, rather than from the standpoint of a new poetics, intent on the invention of new aesthetic values. This, along with the speculative character of Baudelaire's affirmation, may perhaps deny to the sentence just quoted the merit of being the first fully conscious statement of the notion of decadence in modern terms.

It is not a vain tautology to reaffirm that the modern version of that notion starts only with an active, absolute, and positive identification of the apparently opposed ideas of decadence and modernism. Baudelaire, who had failed to go far enough in the critical document just discussed, subtly but clearly conveyed that identification in a poetic text which he composed a few

<sup>5</sup> "Dans les jeux de ce soleil agonissant, certains esprits poétiques trouveront des délices nouvelles."

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years later, just in time to include it in the original edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*. This poem is the sonnet "L'Ennemi," which encloses the passage relevant for our purpose within its second quatrain and the first tercet. While the stanza closing this piece contains hardly more than a rhetorical and yet moving lament, from which we learn, by way of conclusion, that the enemy the poet is complaining about is Time itself, the opening stanza is simply a prelude to the main theme of the whole poem. It is indeed in the second quatrain that the poet unfolds the sonnet's central motif. Here he claims to have already reached the threshold of old age and describes his present task as the almost hopeless attempt to clean up the wasteland of his life from the rubbish left over by youth's flood:

And now, lo, I have reached the autumn of ideas; now I must handle shovel and rake in order to repair the flooded ground, where water digs holes as large as graves.<sup>6</sup>

Yet it is only in the first tercet that the poet draws, so to say, the moral of his fable, although even now he does so only in hypothetical terms. It is also here that the poet helps his readers to realize that the agricultural imagery of the sonnet stands, as in other of his poems, for spiritual creation or, more specifically, for the labors of art:

And who knows whether the novel flowers of my dream will ever find in this soil, dried up like a riverbed, the mystic nourishment which might give them life and strength?<sup>7</sup>

What the poet does in these lines is simply to wonder aloud whether the work plans of his declining years will ever succeed. This makes the poem appear as a highly personal and auto-

<sup>6</sup> "Voilà que j'ai touché l'automne des idées,  
Et qu'il faut employer la pelle et les râteaux  
Pour rassembler à neuf les terres inondées,  
Où l'eau creuse des trous grands comme des tombeaux."

<sup>7</sup> "Et qui sait si les fleurs nouvelles que je rêve  
Trouveront dans ce sol lavé comme une grève  
Le mystique aliment qui ferait leur vigueur?"

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biographical document, written on a perplexing note, in key of doubt, and even of despair. If this is true, then the beautiful image of "the autumn of ideas" must stand for the poet's premature aging, with its attendant impotence, either physical or mental, or both. As for "the novel flowers" of his dream, they must stand, simply and directly, for those *Fleurs du mal* which were his life work. Yet at the time of the writing of this sonnet Baudelaire's masterpiece was far from being a mere dream; it was a reality, which was about to materialize itself into a book. This amounts to saying that the sonnet describes as still unsown, and perhaps as ultimately unable to grow, the very flowers which the poet had just gathered into a beautiful bouquet. Thus the sonnet presents us with a dilemma which cannot be solved by suggesting that what the poet is worrying about might be the future growth of his flowers in the eternal gardens of memory and glory, beyond his life and death. At any rate, such a solution of the problem is made unacceptable by the most cursory reading of the poem itself. The all too obvious contradiction between the immediate autobiographical data and the ultimate meaning of this piece may disappear only if we suppose that this sonnet is after all not as literally autobiographical as it appears to be.

We believe that the poet, although he could not fail to have had in mind such an important fact in his life and career as the imminent publication of *Les Fleurs du mal*, did not compose this sonnet as a *poème de circonstance*. If he is projecting into the future, as an ideal still unfulfilled, and perhaps never to be fulfilled, what at that time was already a real and concrete achievement, then the "novel flowers" of his dream must mean something transcending his own immediate and personal concerns.

If this is true, then that splendid metaphor, "the autumn of ideas," will in the end signify not merely the falling off, in the brain of the poet, of the leaves of thought; it may well represent the sudden appearance in his mind of an autumnal symbol or myth. The autumn of which he speaks is perhaps not simply the autumn of his own soul, but the autumn of the

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spirit, understood in impersonal and historical terms. By projecting his pessimism as a man and a poet into a future which has a mythical rather than a psychological dimension, the poet transcends the autobiographical inspiration of this poem and changes a subjective image into an objective emblem. In brief, the sonnet may well begin as a lyrical confession in elegiac key, only to become in the end a lucid and melancholy allegory of decadence. If this interpretation is right, then the ideal climax of the sonnet must be seen in the paradoxical connection there established between "the autumn of ideas," which now stands for the very idea of decadence, for the aging not of the poet, but of the civilization and culture to which the poet belongs, and those "novel flowers" which now stand not for a private dream, but for the aesthetic vision which his generation, and those to follow, will try to shape into words.

All this implies on the part of the poet an identification of the psychologically and historically old with the spiritually and aesthetically new, or more simply, an identification of decadence and modernism. Modernism, after all, is by definition a work in progress, which is part at once of the present and of the future, half reality and half dream, in short, the attempt to cultivate flowers which no gardener ever grew. All this means that the modern version of the notion of decadence appears when that notion replaces the absolute negation, which was its original substance, with a doubtful hope or with an ambiguous promise, with the vague feeling that some new kind of light or some new form of life will finally emerge from the nightmares and agonies of history, both past and present. Decadence could be thus compared to a haunted house, inhabited not only by *revenants*, but also by the even weirder ghosts of the unborn and the stillborn.

## II

As we have said, Baudelaire's "L'Ennemi" may well be but an allegory of decadence, represented in a series of images reflecting the sphere of private life and individual experience.

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When the modern mind tries, however, to translate that allegory into a more direct and literal statement, it transfers the idea of decadence from the sphere of biography to that of history, changing a psychological and biological metaphor into a universal, historical concept. The central fact in the dialectics of this concept is not merely the abstract recognition that decadence is a fatal, cyclical recurrence, but the concrete acknowledgement that that recurrence is taking place now, in the historical present. Hence the compulsion to compare the current cultural situation with that which obtained in any previous period of decline, especially in those which marked the end of the great civilization of classical antiquity. Such a comparison implies not only a similarity of historical conditions, but also of cultural effect, and this explains and justifies the constant parallel between the artistic works and aesthetic ideals of our *neoteroi* with those of the forgotten masters of senescent Latinity and moribund Hellenism.

Once again it is in a Baudelairean text that we may find one of the earliest and most typical versions of such a parallel. The text itself is but the brief note which he penned in 1857 to accompany the publication, within the framework of *Les Fleurs du mal*, of "Franciscae meae laudes," a poem written in a tongue which the poet defines as the language of the late Latin decadence, but which sounds more like ecclesiastical Latin, as indicated by the poem's obvious imitation of the verbal and metrical pattern of the litanies. This impression seems confirmed by the inscription following the title of the poem: "vers composés pour une modiste érudite et dévote" ("lines written for a learned and pious milliner"). The note, which the poet meant not as commentary but simply as a justification of the exceptional linguistic and literary experiment he had undertaken, reads thus:

Does not the reader feel, as I do, that the language of the late Latin decadence—the agonizing sigh of a strong human being, already transformed and prepared for spiritual life—is peculiarly apt to express passion as the modern world sees and feels it? Mysticism is the alternate

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pole of this magnet. Catullus and his gang, those brutal and superficial poets, knew only its first pole, or sensuality alone. It seems to me that within this wonderful tongue solecism and barbarism convey the compulsive indolence of a passion oblivious of itself and scornful of all precepts. Words, employed in a novel sense, reveal the charming awkwardness of the Northern Barbarian worshipping the beauty of Rome. Pun itself, when it crosses these pedantic stammerings, may well bespeak the wild and baroque grace of infancy.<sup>8</sup>

The piece is brief, and this is why we have quoted it in full. Yet, despite its brevity, it abounds in suggestions and hints. Now is not yet the time, nor here the place, to discuss the connections which Baudelaire establishes in this note between decadence on one side and Christianity and barbarism on the other; nor the presence on that page of such tendencies which we shall elsewhere discuss under the names of agonism and futurism. It will suffice to remark that those two tendencies are already ideally present in the simile by which Baudelaire compares the linguistic transformation of decadent Latin to the spiritual metamorphosis of an aging and ailing man. Yet the central and most relevant idea of this note is not merely its author's belief that there exists a striking similarity of spiritual conditions between his own time and those of the late Latin decadence, but the practical inference he draws from this fact. Such an inference may be stated by saying that similar moral and intellectual experiences must find artistic and literary ex-

<sup>8</sup> "Ne semble-t-il pas, au lecteur comme à moi, que la langue de la dernière decadence latine,—suprême soupir d'une personne robuste déjà transformée et préparée pour la vie spirituelle,—est singulièrement propre à exprimer la passion telle que l'a comprise et sentie le monde poétique moderne? La mysticité est l'autre pôle de cet aimant dont Catulle et sa bande, poètes brutaux et purement épidermiques, n'ont connu que le pôle sensualité. Dans cette merveilleuse langue, le solecisme et le barbarisme me paraissent rendre les négligences forcées d'une passion qui s'oublie et se moque des règles. Les mots, pris dans une acceptation nouvelle, révèlent la maladresse charmante du barbare du nord agenouillé devant la beauté romaine. Le calembour lui-même, quand il traverse ces pédantesques bégaiements, ne joue-t-il pas la grâce sauvage et baroque de l'enfance?"

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pression analogous in form. The historical correspondence must become an aesthetic one: the arts and letters of our time must reflect, like a double mirror, the image of the eternal decadence alongside that of the temporary one.

The writers and artists of decadent Rome look a little like ourselves; and up to a point we must try to become like them. Only such a presupposition could justify, in theory if not in practice, the poet's attempt to treat such an alien medium as the tongue of decadent Latin as if it were a formal equivalent of that novel poetic idiom by which Baudelaire and his peers were then trying to express a new sensibility or, as the writer says, "passion as the modern world sees and feels it."

"Franciscae meae laudes" is a *tour de force*, a single example which was neither repeated nor imitated. Thus that piece must be treated not as an experiment but as an exercise; it could even be considered as a clever joke played by a sophisticated mind in order to mystify the Philistines or *épater le bourgeois*. Yet both note and poem tend ultimately to make the important point: that our age, being a decadent one, must have a decadent style of its own. The man who understood well this principle was Théophile Gautier, and quite properly he revealed this understanding in a posthumous critique of Baudelaire. It was in 1858, just after Baudelaire's death, that Gautier wrote a long essay on the poetry of his friend. By an act of poetic justice that essay was to be constantly reprinted as a preface to those *Fleurs du mal* which its author had originally inscribed to Gautier himself.

In one of those pages, which are universally known but not fully appreciated or understood, Gautier pays great attention to the note to "Franciscae meae laudes," which he quotes in full without, however, taking too seriously that Latin piece, or even the intention that led Baudelaire to write it. After all, Gautier says, "One should not push this idea too far."<sup>9</sup>

Gautier is keenly aware of the fact that the similarity between our culture and the decadences of the ages gone by im-

<sup>9</sup> "Il ne faut pas pousser cette idée trop loin."

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plies not so much the conscious imitation of their language and style as the spontaneous development of a language and style of our own. He states as much in an important passage which, significantly enough, opens with the warning that the epithet decadent may well be a misnomer if we apply it without discrimination to the modern literary situation, or if we fail to realize the originality, or at least the novelty, of the decadent experiment now in progress:

The author of *The Flowers of Evil* loved what is improperly called decadent style, which simply means an art which has attained that condition of extreme maturity, being created under their slanted sunbeams by aging civilizations: a style contrived, complicated, pedantic, full of shadings and preciosity, always pushing farther the boundaries of language, exploiting the terminologies of all crafts; always taking colors from whatever palette, or notes from any keyboard; trying to convey the most inexpressible thoughts and to give shape to the most vague and volatile forms; listening, in order to make them understood, to the subtle confessions of neurosis, to the avowals of a senile and depraved sensuality; or following the strange hallucinations of an obsessive idea, leaning already toward madness. This kind of style is but the final climax of the Word, when compelled to express everything, when pushed as far as, and even beyond, the extreme limit. In connection with that style one may well recall the artificial and marblelike tongue of the late Roman Empire, marked already by the green stains of corruption; or the complex refinements of the Byzantine school, which represent the last phase of Greek art, after it has fallen into its final fainting spell. Such and no other is the idiom fatal and necessary to all those nations and cultures in which an artificial way of life has replaced the natural one, and developed in man needs still unknown. Few styles are as hard as this one, although the pedants scorn it, precisely because it conveys new ideas in novel forms, and with words unheard before. Unlike classical style, it admits shadow: a shadow haunted by the larvae of superstition, the bleak ghosts of sleeplessness, those nightmares and remorses which tremble and turn at the feeblest noise, the monstrous dreams to which only impotence can put an end, those dark fantasies which would astonish daylight, all those obscure, monstrous, and awful realities which the soul hides in its own lowest depths. It is obvious that the fourteen hundred words of the Racinian dialect are not enough

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for the author who undertakes the difficult task of expressing modern ideas and things in their endless complexity and manifold coloring.<sup>10</sup>

This passage is important on several accounts. The parting shot against Racine reveals that Gautier is still viewing the controversy between tradition and modernity in the polemical terms of early Romanticism. Yet he recognizes, at least by implication, that Baudelaire represents a vision of life and a conception of art quite different from those exemplified by the movement which Gautier himself had joined in his youth. Precisely because of this the critic is finally able to submit, with Baudelaire's help, one of the most perspicuous and conspicuous definitions of the idea of decadence in aesthetic terms.

<sup>10</sup> "Le poète des *Fleurs du mal* aimait ce qu'on appelle improprement le style de décadence, et qui n'est autre chose que l'art arrivé à ce point de maturité extrême que déterminent à leurs soleils obliques les civilisations qui vieillissent: style ingénieux, compliqué, savant, plein de nuances et de recherches, reculant toujours les bornes de la langue, empruntant à tous les vocabulaires techniques, prenant des couleurs à toutes les palettes, des notes à tous les claviers, s'efforçant à rendre la pensée dans ce qu'elle a de plus ineffable, et la forme en ses contours les plus vagues et les plus fuyants, écoutant pour les traduire les confidences subtiles de la névrose, les aveux de la passion vieillissante qui se déprave et les hallucinations bizarres de l'idée fixe tournant à la folie. Ce style de décadence est le dernier mot du Verbe sommé de tout exprimer et poussé à l'extrême outrance. On peut rappeler, à propos de lui, la langue marbrée déjà des verdeurs de la décomposition et comme faisandée du bas-empire romain et les raffinements compliqués de l'école byzantine, dernière forme de l'art grec tombé en déliquescence; mais tel est bien l'idiome nécessaire et fatal des peuples et des civilisations où la vie factice a remplacé la vie naturelle et développé chez l'homme des besoins inconnus. Ce n'est pas chose aisée, d'ailleurs, que ce style méprisé des pédants, car il exprime des idées neuves avec des formes nouvelles et des mots qu'on n'a pas entendus encore. A l'encontre du style classique il admet l'ombre et dans cette ombre se meuvent confusément les larves des superstitions, les fantômes hagards de l'insomnie, les terreurs nocturnes, les remords qui tressaillent et se retournent au moindre bruit, les rêves monstrueux qu'arrête seule l'impuissance, les fantaisies obscures dont le jour s'étonnerait, et tout ce que l'âme, au fond de sa plus profonde et dernière caverne, recèle de ténébreux, de difforme et de vaguement horrible. On pense bien que les quatorze cents mots du dialecte racinien ne suffisent pas à l'auteur qui s'est donné la rude tâche de rendre les idées et les choses modernes dans leur infinie complexité et leur multiple coloration."

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With a vigor and stringency hardly to be found in any of the Baudelairean versions of the same view, and, at the same time, with a simple-mindedness and a literalness not nullified even by the long-winded digressions from the main line of his thought, Gautier intelligently and effectively relates the style of decadence to the psychological and spiritual conditions created by a society's or civilization's decline. Gautier defines such style as "the fatal and necessary idiom" of all overcivilized and oversophisticated ages. Naturally enough, he describes that excessive refinement in pathological terms, as both the symptom and the effect of senility and disease, as a corruption which affects body and soul; and this explains the frequency in his statement of terms such as "decomposition," "deliquescence," "neurosis," and the like. Yet, at least in the implications of his diagnosis, he seems to be quite aware that the psychology of decadence derives also from a mystical or metaphysical view. That view coincides with a special philosophy of history, the one which is generally called the cyclical theory. According to that theory, every civilization follows the same pattern of growth and decay as human life, from birth to youth, from youth to maturity, from maturity and old age to death. Decadence is but the conscious acceptance of the impending end of the cycle, as well as of the need to express and represent the sense, if any, of that end. The proof of this may be seen in the frequency in this text of such adjectives as "last," "extreme," "supreme," or of such an adverbial expression as "*à outrance*."

Gautier applies indifferently those adjectives to any decadent style. Yet when he speaks in detail of the latter, he thinks primarily of its most modern and the recent version, uniquely expressing the *Zeitgeist* of Baudelaire's generation, which, up to a point, is also his own. Thus, when he states that that style takes color and notes from all palettes and keyboards, Gautier has certainly in mind that synesthesia of which Baudelaire had been perhaps the greatest modern theorist, and which had been practiced by Gautier himself. Sometimes Gautier goes beyond the contemporary scene and foresees developments which will take place a long time after his death. By affirming the eclectic

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and syncretic character of decadent style, he seems to anticipate that contamination of archaism and modernism which will rule over European art from the end of his century to the beginning of ours, and which, in Germany, Russia, France, and Italy, took respectively such different names as *Sezession*, *Jugendstil*, *Stilizatsiya*, *art nouveau*, and *stile liber*.

This very emphasis on the present, or on a present still in flux, proves that the main point of Gautier's statement is simply that the decadences of the past must give an example rather than precepts; that being decadent now must mean also being new. Decadence and the *Zeitgeist* are one and the same thing. Gautier asserts this principle, although in different words, in a passage immediately preceding the one just quoted, opening with the assertion that the precious novelty of modern poetic speech is, after all, a natural, rather than an artificial fact:

Naïveté is not exactly a feature of the nineteenth century. To convey its thoughts, its dreams, and demands, the latter needs a linguistic medium a little more mixed than so-called classical diction.<sup>11</sup>

Gautier develops this point with a simile suggested by his favorite among the non-verbal arts, which is painting. All the lovers of that art are fond of saying that a landscape is not successful unless it conveys the sense of the hour at which it was painted. Gautier uses this commonplace to advance the general principle that any form of art must give the sense of the historical landscape against which it was created:

Literature is like the day: it has a morning, a noon, an evening, and a night. Without vainly arguing whether one should prefer the twilight of morning over that of evening, one must paint at the hour we find ourselves to be. . . .<sup>12</sup>

Our own time of the day is obviously eventide, and we have

<sup>11</sup> "La qualité du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle n'est pas précisément la naïveté, et il a besoin, pour rendre sa pensée, ses rêves et ses postulations, d'un idiome un peu plus composite que la langue dite classique."

<sup>12</sup> "La littérature est comme la journée: elle a un matin, un midi, un soir et une nuit. Sans disserter vainement pour savoir si l'on doit préférer l'aurore au crépuscule, il faut peindre à l'heure où l'on se trouve. . . ."

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no choice but to paint that time and no other one. Yet, in order to do so, says Gautier in an exuberant development of the same pictorial simile and temporal image, we should have

a palette carrying the colors needed to convey the effects proper to that hour. Has not sunset its own beauty, as morning has? Those reds of copper and greens of gold; those tones of turquoise shading into sapphire; all those colors burning and melting into the grand, final fire; those clouds strangely, monstrously shaped, flooded by light and fashioned like an enormous, aerial Babylon, why should not they cast a spell as poetic as that of rosy-fingered dawn, which we are, however, far from despising?<sup>13</sup>

This proclamation sanctions Decadence as the only aesthetic attitude fully able to express what one might call the vesperal quality of modern culture; and we find no better way to praise its eloquence than to quote a line which was written a long time later by the Austrian poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal:

And much is told by him who says "evening."<sup>14</sup>

### III

The same line could serve as a fitting epigraph, or as a lapidary summary, for another important text, which is Malarmé's "Plainte d'automne." This very early prose poem, perhaps the poet's earliest experiment in that medium, was written a few years before Gautier's essay on Baudelaire. It first appeared in print in 1864 in a forgotten provincial journal, under the title "L'Orgue de Barbérie." Yet, although often

<sup>13</sup> "une palette chargée des couleurs nécessaires pour rendre les effets que cette heure amène. Le couchant n'a-t-il pas sa beauté comme le matin? Ces rouges de cuivre, ces ors verts, ces tons de turquoise se fondant avec le saphir, toutes ces teintes qui brûlent et se décomposent dans le grand incendie final, ces nuages aux formes étranges et monstrueuses que des jets de lumière pénètrent et qui semblent l'écroulement gigantesque d'une Babel aérienne, n'offrent-ils pas autant de poésie que l'Aurore aux doigts de rose, que nous ne voulons pas mépriser cependant?"

<sup>14</sup> "Und dennoch sagt der viel, der 'Abend' sagt."

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reprinted in many ephemeral publications, this piece became widely known, and highly influential, only one quarter of a century later when its author included it in his volume of selections, *Album de vers et prose* (1887). The poem's title refers to its ultimate aim, which is simply to convey by the vulgar tune of a mechanical organ playing outside the poet's window the feeling of overwhelming sadness which stirred once within his soul, still grieving for the loss of a dear feminine friend. The poet sets the tone by an opening in the manner of Poe:

Since Maria left me to go to another star—which one, Orion, Altair, and thou, green Venus?—I have always cherished solitude.<sup>15</sup>

Yet the interest of this text does not lie, at least for us, in the rather sentimental anecdote which seems to be both its occasion and its conclusion, and which acts at once as its climax and as its anticlimax. What really matters in this poem is its long prelude, where the poet unfolds a long series of Baudelairean themes and motifs which he makes his own, as immediately shown by his adoption of his master's all too literary predilection for feline pets:

How many long days have I spent alone with my cat!<sup>16</sup>

The main source of what follows is, however, not any Baudelairean poem or series of poems, but solely and simply the very note to "Francisae meae laudes," which Mallarmé exploits to the full, as shown by his obsessive concern with the literature of late Latinity. That Mallarmé wrote this page with that note in mind may be concretely proved by his use, in its closing sentence, of the verb *bégaié* ("stammers"), which re-echoes the noun *bégaiements* ("stammerings"), used by the earlier poet in the sentence where he had similarly alluded to the admixture of barbaric and Christian elements in the language

<sup>15</sup> "Depuis que Maria m'a quitté pour aller dans une autre étoile—laquelle, Orion, Altaïr, et toi, verte, Vénus?—j'ai toujours cheri la solitude."

<sup>16</sup> "Que de longues journées j'ai passées seul avec mon chat."

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of decadent Rome. It is obvious that here we have to do not merely with a vague verbal echo, but with a complex and highly conscious literary reminiscence. The Baudelairean inspiration of this passage is at any rate fully evident:

I can thus say that I have spent full, long days alone with my cat, and, alone, with one of the last authors of the Latin Decadence; for, since that white being passed away, I have strangely and singularly loved all that could be summarized in this word: fall. Thus within the year my favorite season is the last, languid days of summer, immediately preceding autumn; within the day, the time I choose for a walk is when the sun rests before going down. . . . Likewise, the literature to which my spirit turns to find its delight would be the agonizing poetry of Rome's latest hour, insofar, however, that it does neither breathe the rejuvenating advance of the Barbarians nor mutter the childish Latin of the earliest Christian ametrical chants.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, even though he could not have written this without the precedent of Baudelaire's "Note," the attitude Mallarmé takes here differs from that which Baudelaire had taken there at least in two respects. Unlike Baudelaire, Mallarmé prefers to emphasize the relationship between Latin decadence and the modern spirit in private and personal terms, rather than in historical and cultural ones. His primary intent is to convey the congeniality which may exist between a given psychic mood and a given literary taste. This is the first difference. As for the second, which stems from the first, it is his refusal to reconcile all the antinomies implied in the very dialectics of decadence. While Baudelaire's note joins together the opposite

<sup>17</sup> "Je puis donc dire que j'ai passé de longues journées seul avec mon chat et, seul, avec un des derniers auteurs de la décadence latine; car depuis que la blanche créature n'est plus, étrangement et singulièrement j'ai aimé tout ce qui se résument en ce mot: chute. Ainsi, dans l'année, ma saison favorite, ce sont les derniers jours alanguis de l'été, qui précèdent immédiatement l'automne et, dans la journée, l'heure où je me promène est quand le soleil se repose avant de s'évanouir, avec des rayons de cuivre jaune sur les murs gris et de cuivre rouge sur les carreaux. De même la littérature à laquelle mon esprit demande une volupté sera la poésie agonisante des derniers moments de Rome, tant, cependant, qu'elle ne respire aucunement l'approche rajeunissante des Barbares et ne bégaye point le latin enfantin des premières proses chrétiennes."

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elements of such antitheses as paganism and Christianity, civilization and barbarism, Mallarmé keeps them separate, concentrating his sympathetic attention on old age and degeneration, and neglecting, even ignoring, the moment of agony and death, and even beyond that moment, the vision of the ultimate redemption, or regeneration, of man. Baudelaire emphasizes the final phase of the evolution or involution of decadent Latin when, through the confusion or fusion of all values, senility seems to ally itself to puerility, and a decrepit literary tradition seems to charm even the most sophisticated modern reader, as Baudelaire says, with "the baroque grace of infancy." Mallarmé refuses, however, to go so far, and draws the line at the very edge of an agony which could mean both death and rebirth. For Mallarmé the spiritual delight to be sought in decadent Latin literature could be found only in the hour which precedes its dissolution, the metamorphosis of life into death. What Mallarmé seems to prefer is thus an unadulterated decrepitude, unaffected by either progression or regression, as he himself states at the very end of his own prelude:

I was thus reading one of those dear poems, the heavy make-up of which charms me more than the natural freshness of a youthful face, when....<sup>18</sup>

The significance of "Plainte d'automne" must thus be seen in the poet's attempt to reduce the notion of decadence to a purely imaginative and emotional vision, to fix, as the poet says, "all that might be summarized in this word: fall," into the perfect stasis of an absolute, timeless experience. Here Mallarmé utters the cry of his own Faustian longing: "*Verweile doch! du bist so schön,*" to an ideal and yet passing moment within the fatal hour of decline, during the slow and yet inexorable ebb of the tide of life. By projecting the idea of decadence beyond the frame of history and time, by fixing it forever into the absolute dimension of an eternal present, Mallarmé transforms that idea into a poetic intuition or a lyrical experi-

<sup>18</sup> "Je lisais donc un de ces chers poèmes (dont les plaques de fard ont plus de charme sur moi que l'incarnat de la jeunesse) . . . quand. . . ."

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ence. And this is the reason why, immediately after, he translates all the intellectual and cultural components of that idea into its metaphysical equivalent, into the complex imagery of late summer and early sunset. He accomplishes all this in a few lines, which contain, in a nutshell, the *ars poetica* of decadence. One could almost say that this prelude is a literary *manifesto*, lyrical in inspiration and subjective in tone: the poet proclaims his aesthetic creed in terms of private predilections and personal fancies. Hence the frequency in this prelude of such verbal expressions as "I have always cherished," "I have loved," "my favorite season," and the like. Hence Mallarmé's definition of Latin decadent literature as the one "in which *his* spirit was to find its delight."

All this implies that the attraction of decadence stems from hedonistic considerations as well as from aesthetic ones. This is how it should be, since the worship of art and beauty, or what with Mallarméan words one could call "*la volupté de l'esprit*," is always accompanied by more sensual and material cults. Hedonism may rule alone but aestheticism cannot triumph without the help of hedonism. The peculiar quality of the aesthetic hedonism of the decadent spirit is to be seen in the very fact that that hedonism is not a normal manifestation but one of the aberrations of the pleasure principle. And the specifically decadent perversion of the pleasure principle consists in the merging of the latter with its opposite, the death principle. This leads the decadent spirit to the contemplation of and to the self-identification with the experience of what, with Yeatsian words, may be called "death-in-life" and "life-in-death." If the Baudelairean "Note" leans toward the second alternative, Mallarmé's prose poem leans instead toward the first.

## IV

The same can be said of a Verlainean text, deriving directly from Mallarmé's prose poem, the sonnet "Langueur," which its author included in the first section (*Jadis*) of his collection *Jadis et Naguère*, published in 1884. In that sonnet, as indicated by its title, Verlaine sings in an almost falsetto voice of

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the pathological pleasure of lassitude, exhaustion, and decrepitude. Following both Baudelaire and Mallarmé, Verlaine uses here Latin decadence and its literature as an adumbration of the present cultural and spiritual situation, as both the background and the pretext for a reaffirmation of the morbid hedonism of agony and death. From the viewpoint of its rhetorical construction "Langueur" is a prosopopoeia, in which an abstract personification of decadence speaks in the first person of itself. That personification, which dons an ancient costume and a historical mask (the usual ones of the late Roman Empire), is in reality an allegory of the contemporary *Zeitgeist*. The very intent of that disguise is thus to reveal, rather than to hide, what in Verlaine's time had already become an open secret, i.e., the identity of decadence and modernism.

Verlaine's sonnet evokes the aesthetic hedonism of decadence in quasi-nihilistic terms. The opening quatrain depicts the attitude of the decadent spirit toward the very forces which are preparing its ruin, as a lifeless indifference, as a deadly passivity. The diagnosis of decadence is always the same: apathy of the soul and paralysis of the will. Here, however, we have to do with a self-diagnosis: this picture of Decadence is meant, after all, as a self-portrait. The decadent spirit represents itself in these lines with both self-mockery and self-pity, with a *Schadenfreude* directed against itself. Thus the representation is made pathetic by the self-indulgence whereby the decadent spirit evokes the childish aesthetic games or pastimes by which it consoles and occupies itself under the shadow of disaster and death. Verlaine describes the product of that activity as charming and yet childish artifacts, the splendor of which is but the last, vivid reflection of the dying light of the setting sun:

I am the Empire at the end of decadence, watching the great white barbarians pass by, while composing indolent acrostics in a style of gold where the languor of the sun is dancing.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> "Je suis l'Empire à la fin de la décadence,  
Qui regarde passer les grands Barbares blancs  
En composant des acrostiches indolents  
D'un style d'or où la langueur du soleil danse."

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In the second quatrain, the decadent soul is described as an *animula vagula blandula*, childishly lost in its own *taedium vitae*, in the despair and boredom of its own impotence:

The lonely soul is sick at heart with thick boredom, they say that there long bloody battles are being fought. O nothing doing when one is too tired even to wish, even to want to see this life flourish a little.<sup>20</sup>

The decadent spirit is powerless to feel, and this impotence of feeling prevents it from wishing even for its own death. Here apathy reaches its extreme point, in a paroxysm of negation, in a frenzy of nihilism:

Oh unwillingness and powerlessness even to die a little! Ah! all has been drunk! Bathyllus, have you done laughing? Ah! all has been drunk, all has been eaten. Nothing more to say.<sup>21</sup>

Mallarmé had already conveyed, in the beautiful opening line of "Brise marine," the same sense of physical and spiritual exhaustion, the same feeling that the Self could not undergo any further ordeal or experience, having spent all its creative powers, having used up all its vital resources:

Flesh is sad, alas, and I have read all books.<sup>22</sup>

Mallarmé, however, at least in this poem, transcends that nihilism by submitting it to the transfiguration of art, by indulging in the reverie of poetry, the only one which seems to have a reality of its own. In Verlaine's sonnet no such catharsis is possible, precisely because it evokes the crisis of the decadent spirit in pathetic as well as in pathological terms. That crisis

<sup>20</sup> "L'âme seulette a mal au coeur d'un ennui dense.

Là-bas on dit qu'il est de longs combats sanglants.

O n'y pouvoir, étant si faible aux voeux si lents,

O n'y vouloir fleurir un peu cette existence!"

<sup>21</sup> "O n'y vouloir, ô n'y pouvoir mourir un peu!

Ah! tout est bu! Bathylle, as-tu fini de rire?

Ah! tout est bu, tout est mangé! Plus rien à dire!"

<sup>22</sup> "La chair est triste, hélas! et j'ai lu tous les livres."

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is described here as a neurosis, which has already reached the stage which psychologists and psychiatrists define as manic depression. The soul may react to that extreme condition only by accepting the only consolations, or rather distractions, still offered by the routine or business of living, by taking all too seriously the farcical, little tragicomedies of daily life, the pathetically prosaic occupations and annoyances of every day, the vain troubles and vague longings and foolish worries of every hour:

What you are left is an inane poem to throw into the fire, a wayward slave who neglects his master, a weariness which oppresses you without cause.<sup>28</sup>

Here Verlaine seems to suggest the escape, or rather the retrenchment, of the decadent spirit into a passive, bourgeois way of life. In brief, he anticipates that pathetic and ironic solution which, as we shall try to prove at the proper place, will be sought by such late, sentimental poets as the French Francis Jammes and the Italian Guido Gozzano. Yet neither here nor elsewhere does Verlaine go as far as that; and we can with free justice conclude our analysis of "Langueur" by stating that this sonnet represents the crisis of the decadent spirit in that phase of extreme tension which precedes the fatal relapse. Paradoxically, however, it describes that tension as if it were instead a distension. By reducing the agony of decadence to languor and lassitude, Verlaine changes its climax into an anticlimax. The involuntary effect of this is to turn what was meant as a self-portrayal of the decadent spirit into a sort of self-caricature. Verlaine's intention was to convey the sense of decadence in pathetic terms, and if the poem gives a different impression, it is against the poet's will.

Verlaine must have been dimly aware of this fact, as shown by the unexpected question he asks in the middle of the poem: "Bathyllus, have you ended laughing?" We do not know who

<sup>28</sup> "Seul, un poème un peu niais qu'on jette au feu,  
Seul, un esclave un peu coureur qui vous néglige,  
Seul, un ennui d'on ne sait quoi qui vous afflige!"

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the figure so-called is supposed to represent, nor what he is laughing about. Probably what he is laughing about is that very decadence which in itself is no laughing matter at all. Nothing proves this point better than the total absence of any sense of humor in decadent literature and art. Yet the unknown Bathyllus seems to have good reasons for merriment and mirth. Since decadence cannot remain decadence if able to mock itself, then Bathyllus may well represent an outsider, who judges decadence and laughs at it from the perspective of common sense. That was obviously the perspective which Gilbert and Sullivan did use when they made fun of Wilde and his followers in the musical comedy *Patience*.

If this is true, then "Langueur" becomes almost a self-parody of decadence, although an involuntary one. The same can be said, with far greater justification, of the first manifesto of the self-styled decadent movement, which appeared in the first issue of a short-lived journal quite properly entitled *le Décadent* (1886). The journal was founded by a group of second-rate writers, led by Anatole Baju, who drafted the manifesto, at least in part. Anatole Baju and his friends felt far more consciously than their elders and betters that decadence was but one of the many manifestations of the advance-guard spirit ruling the culture of their time, a fact which was due not to their greater insight, but to their bohemianism, to a distaste for bourgeois life which they expressed in terms of a political as well as an aesthetic protest. These lesser figures chose, however, to manifest that protest by sympathizing with the revolutionary ideal, while all the major representatives of the European decadence felt far more partial toward its opposite, which was the reactionary creed. This fact has some significance since it tends to prove that a leftist radical decadence and a rightist and conservative nihilism are equally possible.

The position of those writers seems even less exceptional when we learn that they were primarily anarchists, who served their libertarian ideals in words more than in deeds. Psychologically, if not ideologically, their elders and betters were anarchists too. But the radicalism of these minor decadents of

## *The Autumn of Ideas*

the left allowed them to see some of the cultural trends of their time more clearly than people like Huysmans and Mallarmé, blinded either by their conservative sympathies or by a political indifference amounting to absolute neutrality. In brief, in their natural tendency to equate the political advance-guard with the aesthetic and cultural one, those men were able to identify decadence with both modernism and futurism. The validity of this intuition is not to be denied by the bad taste and the vulgarity of the proclamation of these decadents of the left. Their grotesque jargon and the shocking intemperance of their assertions seem to anticipate the manifestoes to be later issued by Marinetti and his followers, as well as by the leaders of such movements as Dadaism and Surrealism. This is quite proper, because here Decadence defines itself, and in terms which later movements will make their own. The first statement will be repeated *verbatim* by the Futurists:

Born from the oversophistication of a Schopenhauerian civilization, the Decadents are not a literary school. . . .<sup>24</sup>

The second statement is a nihilistic declaration which Futurists and Dadaists will repeat almost with the same words:

Their task is not to lay foundations, but merely to destroy, to make all old-fashioned things fall. . . .<sup>25</sup>

The final statement amounts to a definition of the decadent *Zeitgeist* which sounds like a self-parody:

To belie the state of decadence we have reached would be the greatest nonsense. . . . Society disintegrates under the corrosive action of a civilization which melts away. . . .<sup>26</sup>

Here the pathos of decadence becomes its bathos as well.

<sup>24</sup> "Nés du surblaséisme d'une civilisation schopénauresque, les Décadents ne sont pas une école littéraire. . . ."

<sup>25</sup> "Leur mission n'est pas de fonder. Ils n'ont qu'à détruire, qu'à tomber les vieilleries. . . ."

<sup>26</sup> "Se dissimuler l'état de décadence où nous sommes arrivés serait le comble de l'insenséisme. . . . La société se désagrège sous l'action corrosive d'une civilisation déliquescente. . . ."

## *Lucien Stryk*

### THE ANNIVERSARY

The sun rising,  
The sun setting,  
Takes no more beauty on  
Than yours whom the years

Have carried like  
A vessel across  
The grinding seas. I ride  
You like a Sinbad,

Seeking what I have  
But cannot find  
Until the Roc lies  
Plucked and bleeding

On the shore all  
Sailors curse. O love,  
This ten years' voyage  
In your arms

Has taught me nothing  
That I did not know  
When, sighting you,  
I swam to board

The one fair ship  
Among the blistered prows.

## CLIMBING THE FINAL SLOPE...

Climbing the final slope  
He thought of them below  
Lledged with the rancid goats;  
    Two hundred feet to go,  
Their envy snapping on the rope,

He spat into the sun.  
Then the mountain threw him:  
Like a butcher's beast he hung,  
    Lashed to a crazy limb,  
By pride and the wind undone.

By pride and the wind undone,  
Legs swinging far beneath,  
He felt the goats and their kids  
    Nibbling at his feet,  
And the sun's beak in his bone.

## *Doris Holmes*

### TO THE MOULTED SNAKE

Moist you are, and most must be  
Yourself, now grown and almost free.  
The thin new skin in hazy sun  
Grew long before you were undone.  
Stop coiling only in within;  
Risk this tissue and begin.  
Roll down rock in full vocation:  
Yours so clearly undulation.  
"Not to eat; not for love." Some even say  
The world was made by God at play.  
Uncoil your chilly fear today.  
The old husk lies there dry and done;  
New skin thickens, touching stone.

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# William Rimmer

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## *HIS LIFE & ART*

BY LINCOLN KIRSTEIN

*"Whose work is this?"*

"No man's work," replied Drowne. "The figure lies within that block of oak, and it is my business to find it."

"Drowne," said the true artist [J. S. Copley], grasping the carver fervently by the hand, "you are a man of genius!" . . .

"Strange enough!" said the artist to himself. "Who would have looked for a modern Pygmalion in the person of a Yankee mechanic!"

"Drowne's Wooden Image," by Nathaniel Hawthorne (*The Boston Book*, 1850)

THE LIFE OF WILLIAM RIMMER might have served as an ironic fable for Hawthorne, or a sardonic tragedy for Melville: genius smothered under an ancestral cloud; loneliness in the heart of crowds; black secrets in the city sun; the curse of Timon softened by Christian abnegation. An artist worthy of our sombre line from Washington Allston through Cole, Quidor, Vedder and Ryder, it took nearly seventy years to estimate his triple stature as teacher, sculptor and painter. Self-taught, he was more learned in the anatomy of men and animals than any American until Eakins. He was, after Rush, our most powerful romantic sculptor. Like Rush before him, and Eakins after, whom Philadelphia suffocated for their preoccupation with the human body, he was an artist exhausted by his milieu. He hacked at granite Boston as at the stone he most preferred; it dulled his edge and broke his spirit. Out of fifty years of work there exist less than a dozen pieces of sculpture and some score of paintings. His three masterpieces were not cast in bronze for twenty-five years after his death. Well

known in his own time, his name today only evokes the question: Who was William Rimmer?

Who he was may never be known; who he believed himself to be was the closest secret of his life. He thought he was the son of a man who by rights was king of France. This was the key of his career, his eccentricity, arrogance, his superior education and the symbols of the lion and gladiator, which recur as a signature through his work. Whether or not his father was actually the son of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, he certainly thought so. So, it appears, did Audubon, the Reverend Eleazar Williams, and others. However, Thomas Rimmer's claims to the Bourbon throne are as plausible as any; more so than most.

There is no space here to record the devious combination of fact and family tradition which supports, however uncertainly, Thomas Rimmer's claim to have been Dauphin. Suffice to say, both he and his sons believed that he was, and that he had been spirited from the Temple in 1794, taken to England and there educated like a prince in a South Lancashire yeoman family named Rimmer, whose crest oddly enough was "a Dauphin, naiant, proper," or, translated from the heraldic, a dolphin swimming on a sea of blue. According to this family tradition, the boy, supported by the privy purses of the British and Russian crowns, was raised a Catholic and taught to speak Latin and the modern European tongues, with the notable addition of Russian. He learned mathematics, music, chemistry, fencing and how to make fine shoes. Drawn early to military life, he was commissioned a British officer, confidently expecting to be called to the French throne, for which he was carefully reared for twenty years.

Neither the Russians nor the English wanted doubt cast on the legitimacy of Napoleon's successor and the first restored Bourbon. Hence they backed the last king's certain brother rather than his possible son. On July 8th, 1815, Louis XVIII re-entered Paris. In Liverpool a young man, forever after known as Thomas Rimmer, desperately awaiting the turn of fortune for the month since Waterloo, threw up his commission and married a dumpy little red-haired Irish woman, presumably a servant connected with the Rimmer household. On February 20th, 1816, a son, William, was born. The family emigrated to Nova Scotia, from there to Aroostook County in northern Maine, from there by stages to Boston.

"Thomas Rimmer" assumed the cobbler's trade, at which he was more than proficient. Afraid of admitting royalist connections in a republican world, even perhaps fearing the long arm of Fouché's or Talleyrand's secret agents, he brought up his large family in virtual seclusion—first along the Boston waterfront, later in and around South

Boston. Possessed of a violent temper, frustrated, embittered to the point of derangement, he nevertheless educated his children as he had been. There was hardly a private academy in New England where they could have learned what he taught: French, history, geography, music, mathematics, painting, ornithology, Latin and some Hebrew. They experimented in electricity and metallurgy. He made them musical instruments; each child had a silver flute adapted to his voice.

The eldest, William, early took responsibility for the others. He earned his own living as early as he could, but there never seems to have been a time when he was not encouraged to be an artist. As an infant he snipped butterflies out of a chintz quilt and horses of india-rubber shoe-soles. There was a stone-mason's yard opposite his home, near Wales Wharf, and he cut small figures out of gypsum. One survives, of remarkable intensity and instinct for anatomical detail. This nude figure (anticipating by fifteen years Crawford's *Orpheus*, long credited as the first American male carved figure) was done when Rimmer was fifteen. Called *Despair*, it was a portrait of his father. This and a later profile drawing shows Thomas Rimmer with the famous lobeless ears, the nose and chin of the Bourbons.

Until twenty-one Rimmer was an apprentice typesetter, soapmaker, lithographer, and signpainter. He worked in the lithographic shop of T. Moore, which was a kind of practical art school, the only one that Boston could then afford, employing such young draughtsmen as Benjamin Champney, David Claypoole Johnson and Andrew Jackson Davis. They turned out letterheads and music-covers. Few of Rimmer's stones are known today; each shows a certain technical sophistication distinct from the usual commercial work of their kind. Even late in life he preferred to draw with a lithographic type of crayon inside the decorative gilt frames of lithographic mats. He formed a partnership with Elbridge Harris, a scenepainter and decorator. Their tradesign was a huge "Cromwell at the Battle of Marston Moor," which hung on Washington Street, opposite the Old South Church. Boston had never before seen such dashing expanses of reds and yellows.

It was the age of panoramas and huge exhibition pictures. Hidden from the public in his Cambridgeport studio, Washington Allston, who had known Fuseli, John Martin and Haydon, who had painted Coleridge, yet who had chosen to return to America, was working on his never-to-be-finished *Belshazzar's Feast*. Young Rimmer conceived a grandiose *After the Death of Abel*. A friend found him trying to choose between eight female models. He wished to paint Eve as God made her, but since his picture was intended for paid show in Boston and the year was 1839, she was draped. Someone remarked her drapery looked like

a doormat. "It ought to," growled Rimmer, "it was painted from one."

His lifelong obsession was with the nude in art and nature: "Anatomy is the only Subject." Aside from the rude powerful carvings of Rush (who had made wooden anatomical models for Dr. Caspar Wistar), the male body was barely recognized in America until the Boston Atheneum commissioned Crawford's weak *Orpheus* in 1843. Even then, and long after, the antiseptic nudes of Greenough, Powers and Palmer could enter the United States only through the sanctioning prestige of having been cut in Italy. Undeterred by the antique, contemptuous of Canova and Thorwaldsen, Rimmer preferred America even when he had the chance to leave. Blake never went to Italy; his visions were inside his head. Rimmer's models, after he began practicing medicine, were the bodies of his patients, but he would wait twenty years before he could use them in his art.

While Melville struggled with his White Whale on sea and land, and Whitman was a journeyman-printer, Rimmer, working as a cobbler to keep himself, became through self-study a practising physician. He married a Quaker lady of the New Bedford family of Peabody, and settled in Randolph, Massachusetts. In nearby Hingham lived Captain Horace Howard Watson, whose uncle Elkanah had been an American agent at Nantes in the Vendée, during the Terror, and whom tradition linked with the escape of the Dauphin. Rimmer painted his portrait and many others, touring the neighboring villages, limning heads and miniatures at five dollars the head. In Randolph he met Dr. Abel Kingman, in whose library he found the books which were to serve as the basis for his medical education. Kingman was later the European agent for A. T. Stewart, the New York merchant, and was always grateful to the young Rimmer for his introduction to painting.

Rimmer studied the structure of the human body out of his almost universal curiosity, and also because he early realized the disposition of bones and muscles was the foundation of antique and renaissance art. He annotated a recent translation of Cruveilhier's academic *Anatomy*; he knew the old plates in Vesalius, Albinus, Sabatini, Camper, and the new ones in de Fau and Gray. He was given access to the dissecting-rooms of the Massachusetts Medical College (later the Harvard Medical School). He knew the important Boston collections illustrative of comparative anatomy, both animal and human, gathered by Warren, Jackson and later by Peabody. Entirely self-taught as a physician, Rimmer became well known for his "cold water" treatment of typhoid, cholera and smallpox, and was called in consultation by experienced doctors. Around 1855, after practising for some ten years, he was issued a formal license by the Suffolk Medical Society, and was henceforth known, even

after he abandoned his practice for painting and sculpture, as Dr. Rimmer. He did not fancy the use of drugs, and while he loved dissection, he was dutiful but never deeply interested in his practice, which he used simply as a means of livelihood.

Mystery dims the years he spent between Brockton, Randolph and Boston. He withered in these towns; he knew no artists. He had slight connection with the Boston of Beacon Hill, or the Cambridge of Harvard. And there was always his father to look after. Around 1848, he was placed in a cottage in Concord, where he could be discreetly tended, for the elder Rimmer was driven to drink. Emerson with his habitual anonymous generosity managed to be of help. The Rimmer children enjoyed amateur theatricals with the Alcott family. At one low point in the family fortunes, after serious conference, it was decided to send a signet ring bearing the Bourbon lilies to Queen Victoria. This last link with the past was dispatched into mystery. Thomas Rimmer died in 1852. A nurse told his granddaughter, who years later investigated the circumstances kept from her as a child, that he died raving, his screams ringing through the town all night.

Thomas Rimmer Junior, a generous, well-educated mining engineer, returned from the California Gold Rush of '49, and for a time the family prospects appeared to brighten. William Rimmer was bringing up a large family. He lost three sons in their infancy, but three daughters survived. For Father John Roddan, a diocesan priest and energetic builder of churches around Brockton and Quincy, he painted a curious *Infant Saint Peter*, now lost, using a son as his model. This and many others of his religious pictures painted for the Jesuit church of St. Mary's in Boston as early as 1836 were later in the century taken for old Italian paintings. Surviving ambrotypes reveal them as mannerist adaptations of Correggio, Guido or Salvator Rosa. Rimmer dreamed of an *Assumption* in which the Virgin would glow as all glory, to need no nimbus. From his early youth he was patronized by the Catholic Church, although never a communicant in his maturity. Rather, he was a Christian Transcendentalist, a well-read amateur theologian, who was not too timid to argue with the great convert Orestes Brownson and who told Louisa May Alcott that the preacher Theodore Parker was no Christian since he denied the miracles of Jesus. He composed sacred music for Father Roddan, played the organ and trained his choir. But he always allowed his wife, a Quaker, and his daughters to take a pew in any church they pleased, including the Methodist.

Late in 1855 he moved out to East Milton, where they cut the granite quarried at Quincy. Here he practised among the sick quarrymen, and those who had been hurt in the work. Once, driving over

country roads at night, he was thrown from his buggy, went on to tend his patients, setting his own broken nose before going home. He had trouble with the butcher's bill, and little time for his art. In 1849 he had essayed a portrait of his eldest daughter in marble. Now, surrounded by granite, he started again. He carved an ornamental keystone for a Boston building, later destroyed in the Great Fire of 1872, and a head of the wife of a quarry owner, now lost. Through the owner of a granite firm he made the acquaintance of Stephen Higginson Perkins, his most influential patron and friend. It was Perkins, long interested in the arts, who had been called to appraise the contents of the dead Washington Allston's studio, and found *Belshazzar's Feast*, after twenty years of work, a vast, sad, ambiguous wreck. Perkins chose Allston's finest surviving drawings and had them superbly engraved at his own expense. The copy Perkins gave Dr. Rimmer survives. It affected him greatly in style and subject.

Inspired by the tales his father had told him, Rimmer's imagination seems always to have teemed with equestrian battles, wild charges, the rush of banners, armies sweeping up dizzy parapets, the fall of angels, the thunder of demon wings. His ideas swarmed onto paper: there are many sketches of compositions which he never had the chance to paint. He became increasingly skillful in manipulating the human body. He loved to design it at the point of collapse or the peak of extreme tension. Ingres said the test of a draughtsman was his ability to depict a falling figure. Rimmer mastered the Satanic collapse, and his *Fall of Day* is not an unworthy tribute to Milton's epic. Rimmer felt the daemon of physicality; as Blake said of Milton, he was "a true poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it."

Neither Allston's sketches nor the mezzotints of John Martin, a precursor of Gustave Doré, and a popular illustrator of Milton, were his sole models. The Boston Athenaeum, a proprietary library and art gallery, had shown Boston since 1822 an ever-growing collection of casts, mainly from the antique. *Night* and *Day* from the Medici tombs were of exceptional interest. They were not copies from earlier moulds, but proof casts, obtained by the sculptor Horatio Greenough in 1834 from the last Duke of Urbino. There was also a Roman marble of the Medici Venus, which served Rimmer for his callipygian ideal Woman, just as he derived his norm of Man from the Borghese Gladiator. The Athenaeum held annual exhibitions of painting; Rimmer might have seen here canvases attributed to every great artist of western Europe. The Dutch and English schools were somewhat more correctly identified than the Italian or German, but a fair idea of main currents could have been obtained from school-pieces or early copies labelled N. Possino

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(Nicolas Poussin), or simply: Pittore Olandese.

Boston was less an intellectual than a spiritual vacuum for Rimmer. He belonged not to the Brahmin caste but to that untouchable side which young Henry Adams knew as "blackguard Boston"—South Boston, Chelsea, the newer outskirts swelling with Irish immigrants—the Boston of parish priests and the South End gangs. Set apart, first by the ambiguity of his ancestry, then by the amateur standing of his position in his chosen profession, Rimmer in isolation made his art his private life.

In four weeks of December 1860 he cut out of solid granite an agonized head of Saint Stephen, who suffered the martyrdom of being stoned. This was carved for Stephen Perkins. (There is a drawing of *The Stoning of Saint Stephen* and a lost painting of the same subject. Rimmer also composed a prose philosophical narrative called *Stephen and Phillip*.) The head is of extreme, if naive violence. Its intention was to show the harshness of physical suffering of the saint "under lapidation," and he literally tore its pained features from the rock. His hands were cut, his arms swollen, his whole body exhausted from the month's hard labor of stonecutting and reforging the tools which his Quincy granite dulled every twenty minutes. As in everything Rimmer achieved there is a hidden symbolism or at least a double meaning. Stephen stoned is also an artist stoned, and a martyr made by subjection to the rock from which he was carved.

The head was exhibited at Williams' and Everett's art shop on Washington Street. It attracted some attention in the newspapers, and was held something of a marvel, mainly for having been made by a physician unschooled in art. When asked to value it Rimmer figured in terms of a stonemason's hourly pay. To his amazement, Mr. Perkins put its price at five hundred dollars. James Jackson Jarves, the perspicacious collector and pioneer critic, wrote in *The Art Idea* (1864) that in his *Saint Stephen* Rimmer showed "a fine capacity for lofty expression," and that in his *Falling Gladiator* "the knowledge of anatomical science displayed is wonderful, although the choice of time and action partakes more of mechanical than aesthetic art."

Mr. Perkins gave Rimmer one hundred dollars to commence his *Falling Gladiator*. Begun February 4th, 1861, it was finished June 10th of that year. He spent some two hundred hours on the figure, using no model but his own body, working in an unheated basement in East Milton. He piled up the raw clay, hacking into it, working from the outside in, to free the masses. He did not build up from a supporting armature, of the practical use of which he seemed quite ignorant. He carved rather than modelled, although his material was clay, not stone. It might have been easier in stone. His clay dried, and he wet it; then

it froze, cracked and slipped. He propped it with poles. Repeatedly he was called out to visit patients in the midst of his work. Curious neighbors came to gape. Mr. Perkins, enthusiastic over the development of his "Yankee Michelangelo," offered numerous suggestions, which the sculptor in grateful desperation felt constrained to accept. Hence he lengthened one foot, then saw that it affected the whole stance of the figure, changed it back again and found his original intention lost. He suffered from nervous tension and palpitations, but at last, having smoothed down the surface with a toothbrush, among other homely utensils, the piece was cast in plaster, in which impermanent form it remained through his lifetime, and long after.

The nude helmeted athlete is shown as having received a staggering blow, causing one arm to be thrown up, his other hand clasping a shattered blade. Part of its drama derives from its sense of double strain. The whole body seems thrust up from the toes to meet the blow, while from certain angles it appears on the verge of dissolution of all its muscular stress. Its rhythm is centrifugal, drawn taut like a bow—the opposite of Myron's *Discus Thrower*, which is centripetal. While its entire surface is netted with muscles, which tend to break up its superficial texture, the general concept of the piece and its realization are as far from academic salon sculpture as they are from the spirit of the Hellenistic casts which Rimmer had certainly seen in the Athenaeum. He wrote: "Avoid skeleton outlines. Make no display of technical anatomy. A work of art should be something more than the solution of a problem in science." Unlike the *St. Stephen*, the *Gladiator* is not a naive work. Compared with his contemporaries Story, Ball, Powers or Crawford, it is exceptional in that it is neither static nor imitative. Instead of being terrified by the nude, as they were, Rimmer was attracted by it. But even Saint-Gaudens in the next generation did not attempt the male nude.

A unique achievement, it is Rimmer's masterpiece. Nothing preceded it to give a hint of its power; he never carved anything afterwards on the same scale. In a sense it exhausted him. It was a triumph of exhaustion, in itself the symbol of physical and moral strain; a touch of sympathetic magic attended it. The effort to isolate so extreme a force, to fix so violent a condition, drained the artist. So much in the *Gladiator* was based on personal knowledge—not of anatomy alone. In his narrative of *Stephen and Phillip* he wrote: "And I looked at him with many bitter thoughts as one might look [the following he scratched out, but it may be deciphered] upon the son of a great King, wondering of his strange fortune, who, knowing not his inheritance, was a gladiator having no call but to shed blood at another's will."

Mr. Perkins took casts of the two pieces abroad. The *Gladiator* was

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William Rimmer

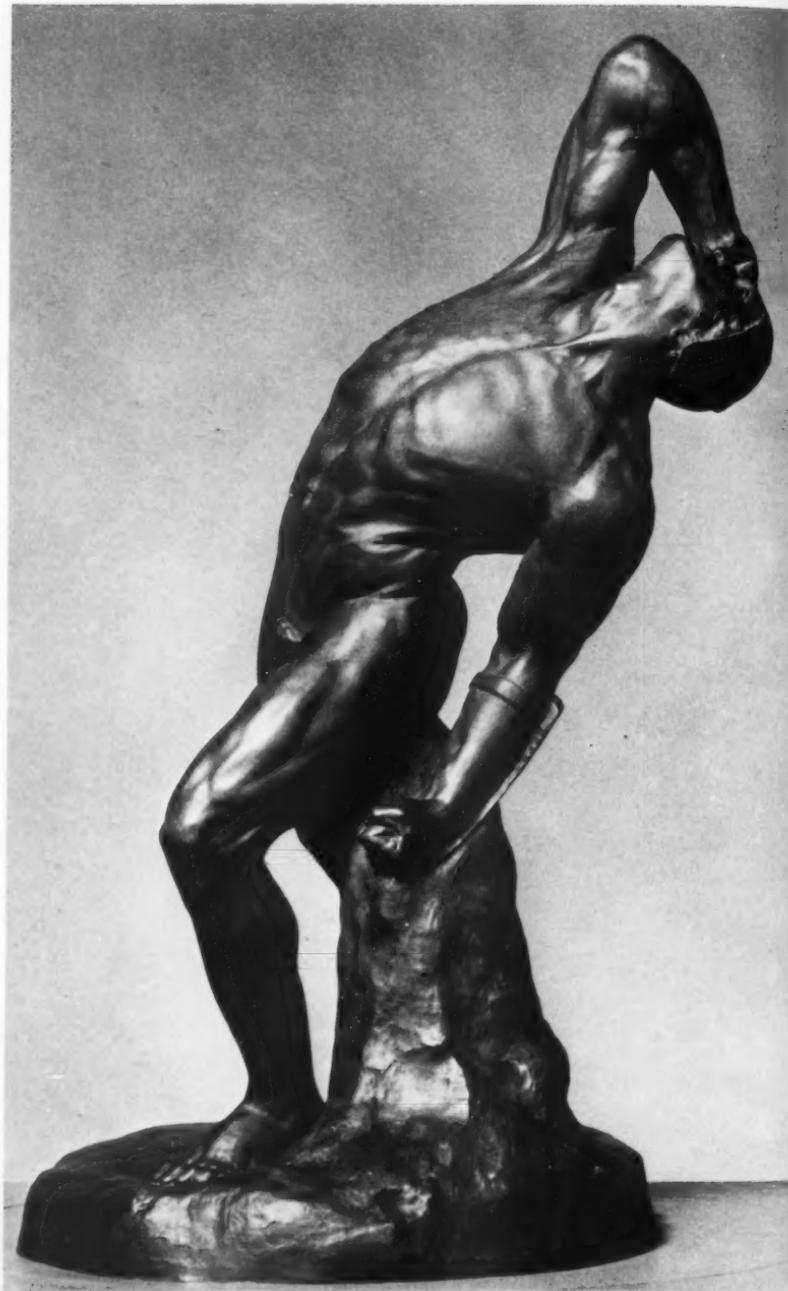
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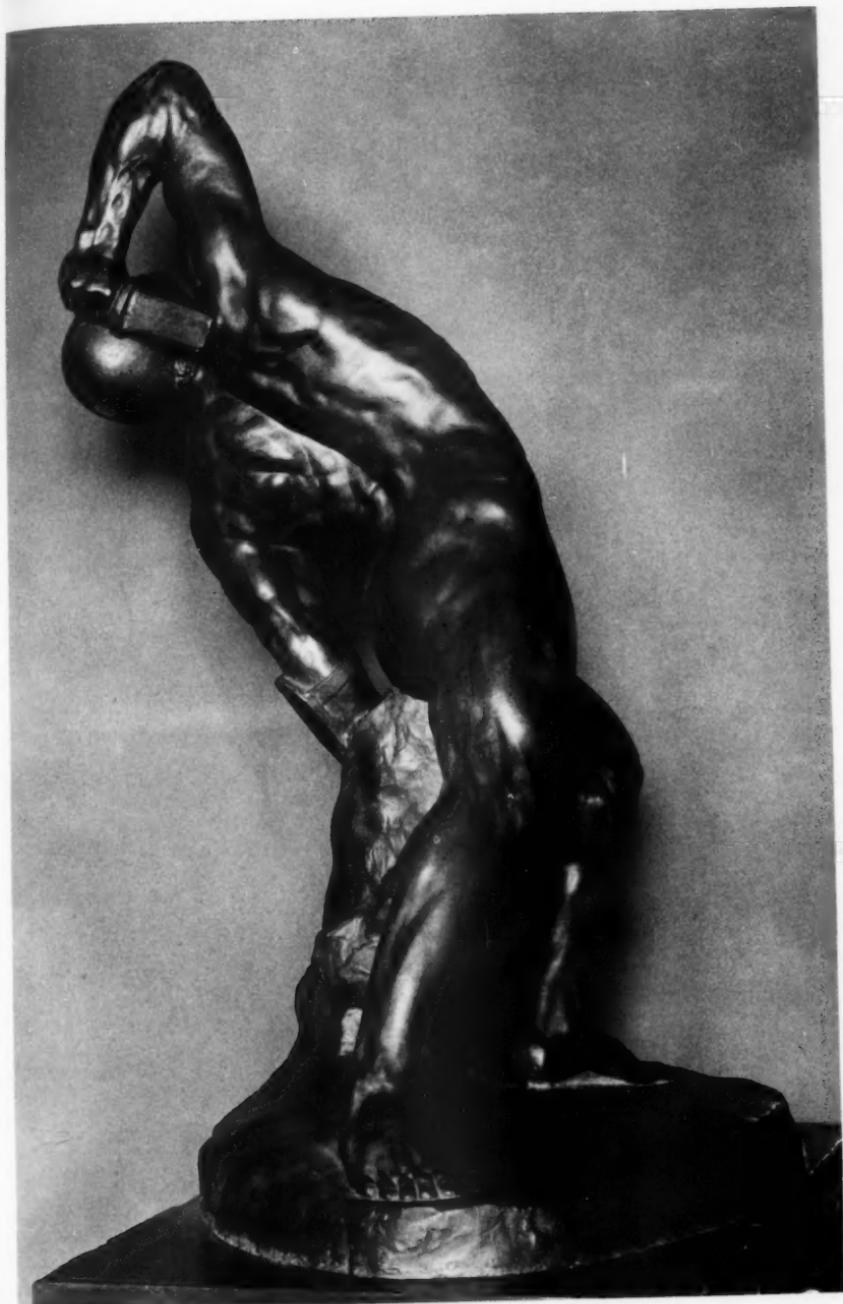
Dying Centaur 1871 Plaster



Alexander Hamilton Monument, Commonwealth Avenue, Boston  
1865      Bronze



Falling Gladiator 1861 [plaster] Bronze



Falling Gladiator      rear view



Despair c.1830 Gypsum





Evening, or The Fall of Day c.1869 Oil and sanguine 40" x 50"



A Dead Soldier Drawing



Dante and the Lion 1878 Drawing



Achilles 1867 Drawing

The Struggle between North and South 1862 Drawing





Sketch of a Horse 1871 Drawing

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### Use

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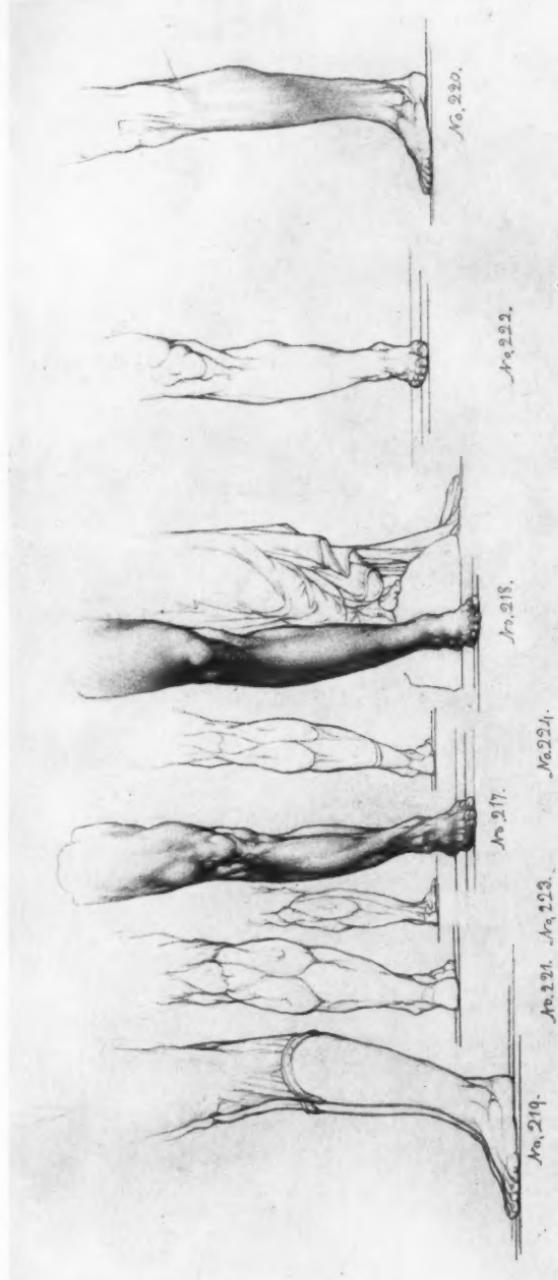
Posterior

Anus

Use of the muscles as elements of proportion.  
Details of Structure, re-enacted and unrepresented, illustrated.

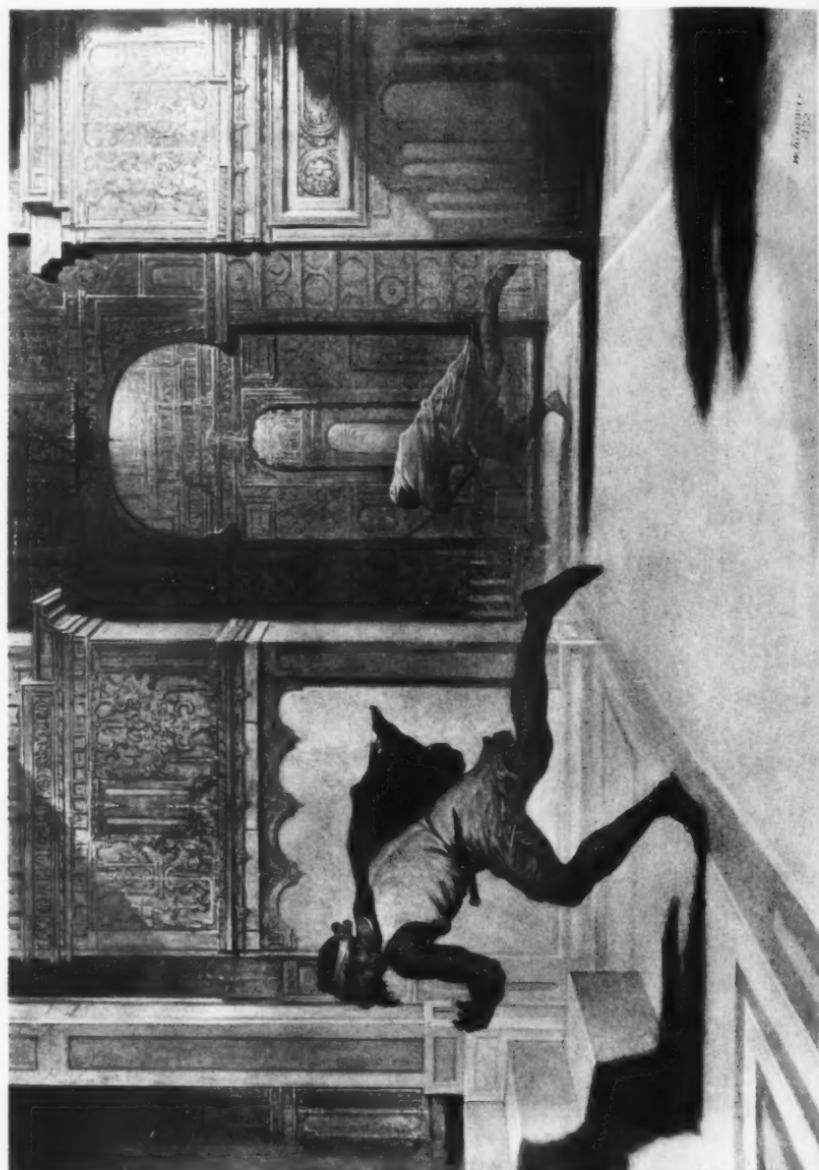
- 1. *Amorial Bands of Trapezius.*
- 2. *Spans of Semispina.*
- 3. *Line Head of Trapezius.*
- 4. *Third Muscle.*
- 5. *Line Major.*
- 6. *Lymph Spindle.*

13



No. 218. Inequimnary youthful. No. 220. Shank long. No. 217. Coarse and muscular. No. 224. Shank circu. Y.

The Body, from the *Art Anatomy*, p. 32 1876 Drawing



Flight and Pursuit 1872 Oil 18" x 26"

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broken but repaired, and exposed in the Paris Salon of 1862. As with Rodin after him, Rimmer was accused of having taken casts of portions of a human body, and then arranging them as his own. However, local sculptors realized no such pose could ever have been contained in a cast. Powers, seeing the *Stephen* in London, was reported as having placed it beside the head of Laocoön. Story and others admired it in Florence, and a cast was requested by the National Museum in Berlin.

*The Falling Gladiator* made its small local sensation, and Mr. Perkins, pleased at public corroboration of his prodigy, persuaded Rimmer to leave the provinces of East Milton and venture into Boston proper—the first time he participated directly in the life of his city. At forty-five, he would know personally, though never intimately, those names that made Boston the Athens of America and, in Dr. Holmes' wry *mot*, the Hub of the Universe. It is perhaps difficult for us who think of Boston as alive with the courage of the Abolitionists, the wisdom of Concord and the prestige of Harvard, to comprehend the active snobbery and philistinism which faced so heterodox a figure as Dr. Rimmer. As a foreigner he would have been far more welcome. But in spite of his decent reputation as a physician and his growing fame as a sculptor, he was neither granted social equality nor treated as a professional artist by those in a position to most further his gifts. He would never belong to the Saturday Club; he did not frequent Mrs. Appleton's evenings nor Mr. Brimmer's afternoons. Part of it was his own fault. He was arrogant and nursed his own secrets. He had a fair estimate of his own talents and many of his contemporaries' lack of them. Ultimately, the *Gladiator* was dismissed as an exposition of muscles by an ingenious dilettante. Rimmer neither defended nor pushed himself. He knew more about art than most of the well-travelled Brahmins, and though never to view the Louvre or the Vatican, felt closer to Michelangelo than to the artists of his epoch.

Although not an active Abolitionist, he was much moved by the Civil War. Some of his most ingenious and finished drawings derive from it. He invented emblematic figures of "Secessia," and "Columbia," North and South, as giants locked in titanic conflict. His drawings, sold in photographic reproduction for the benefit of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw's Negro volunteer regiment, might serve to illustrate Herman Melville's "Conflict of Convictions," opening his *Battle-Pieces* of 1866:

Satan's old age is strong and hale,  
A disciplined captain, gray in skill,  
And Raphael a white enthusiast still;  
Dashed aims, at which Christ's martyrs pale,  
Shall Mammon's slaves fulfill?

Rimmer was now requested to teach artistic anatomy, and in November 1861, following the completion of the *Gladiator*, began his lectures in Room 55 of the Studio Building. He was an inspiring teacher; John LaFarge, William Morris Hunt, Daniel Chester French, Frederick Vinton, Frank Benson and many others testified to it. His local influence was widespread, if diffuse; he represented the first thorough art instruction based on the human figure to be given in Boston, and indeed in the entire United States. There were drawing-schools long before him, but their masters at first used prints, then casts, as their only models. They were far more occupied in rendering surface lights and shadows than in construction or the nude. Rimmer's lectures were never mere dry analyses of muscles and their attachments. He drew brilliantly on the blackboard, combining technical diagrams with fantastic embellishments. His figures sprouted wings, were set off by elegant draperies, sat beside elaborate urns, were clad in fanciful armor, brandished trumpets and daggers. The occasion of the death of the statesman and art patron Charles Sumner furnished the excuse for a lecture on "Grief" and its representation in art. A solid basis below, a playful adornment above the surface of his pedagogy, his method derived from an ingenious mixture of renaissance and classic sources with contemporary science.

Darwin's *Expression of Emotion in Men and Animals* served as a springboard for curious comparisons of various skull types. The profile of Thomas Rimmer appears as "The Highest Average Outline: English"; next to it is a head showing "The Change in Form from Anglo-Saxon to Anglo-American, in Which the Proportions Change to the Indian Form." He noted: "Make your men deep chested and narrow waisted, like a lion; for we live on this world not by let but by opposition."

For other models, Rimmer also frequented a private gymnasium at the corner of Eliot and Tremont Streets, and noted the magnificently muscled back of Henry K. Bushnell, a local virtuoso on the parallel bars. He knew the charts of the emotions devised by Lavater, whom Blake and Fuseli admired, and the phrenological system of Spurzheim, who was buried in Mount Auburn Cemetery, and whose heart and brain were pickled in the Warren Natural History Museum. Louis Agassiz at Harvard had long given his chalk-talks on the systematization of plants and animals, and there too Jeffries Wyman was making his great pioneer research in comparative anatomy.

In 1863 he was invited to lecture at the Lowell Institute, which might have been considered as the accolade of official Boston. His talks were so crowded that he gave an extra afternoon series for ladies. He liked to teach women, although he despaired when inevitably his best

pupils quit their professional promise, to marry. He also taught men, but he seemed, by virtue of his personal magnetism, to have been able to exact more industry and concentration from his female students, which also was the case with William Morris Hunt. There was considerable opposition to Rimmer's insistence that they work from the nude, and at one point it was suggested that the young females wear veils during his lessons. Ednah D. Cheney, Louisa May Alcott's biographer, reports: "This Mohammedan solution did not meet the feeling of the women, and I think the lessons were not repeated." However, he himself was curiously prudish about exposing the male body entirely undraped. Some of his more serious students begged for it but he refused to enter the studio.

The authority of his teaching, first at the Lowell Institute, and later as a term lecturer at Harvard, brought him some recognition as an artist. He joined the Boston Art Club, few of whose members were artists, but which held annual exhibitions and frequent dinners. "The palette and the *palate* seem to thrive together," a cynical artist wrote. However, it provided a genteel vaguely Bohemian atmosphere for the more Philistine patrons of the city. This increased recognition led to his first and last chance at an important public commission. The Public Gardens had recently been completed, and Boston, by filling in the Back Bay, created Commonwealth Avenue, a handsome parade with a park running down its center. Important families deserted the acropolis of Beacon Hill to build grand houses on lower Commonwealth. The new householders proposed to raise, facing the Gardens, a statue of Alexander Hamilton, the saint of Federalism, defender of "the rich, the well-born and the able," whose heirs were still supreme in State Street. Rimmer received the commission for this votive offering, to be erected as the private gift of Thomas Lee, although the request to the city was signed by a dozen illustrious neighbors. The model was completed in eleven days, in an unoccupied Chelsea church.

On August 24th, 1865, the *Hamilton* was unveiled. It had been cut out of a solid block of granite, nine feet four inches high. It stands on an eight-foot monolithic block. From five thousand dollars given him, Rimmer paid for materials, labor and the erection of the monument. He was left with less than two thousand for his heroic labors. Mr. Lee generously awarded him an extra twelve hundred for a plaque of the profiles of Washington, Hamilton and John Jay, inset in the base. Yet Rimmer was savagely attacked for having accepted the commission at all; it was considered "a surrender to domestic necessity over his inherent skill."

*Hamilton* was considered by those in a position to criticize works of art in Boston to have been a crucial test which Rimmer failed. George B. Woods, the critic, said it was "swathed like an infant or a mummy."

William H. Downes, a well known pundit of the '90's, said it "suggested a snow image which had partly melted." Yet Mr. Lee and his family were content, and William Morris Hunt, who certainly knew the best of Europe, found it impressive. And truly, it is a noble work. As the poet John Wheelwright wrote, there is something of the ship's figurehead about it, a trace of naiveté, recalling Rush. But the mass and its drapery are powerfully suggestive, anticipating Rodin's *Balzac* in the looming treatment of the rising form, and the head penetrates the character of the great bastard from Nevis who said, "The people, sir, the people are a great beast."

Thomas Lee was pleased to present statuary to Boston. Next on his list was a *Good Samaritan* as a memorial to Morton, whom the city claimed as the discoverer of anaesthesia. Rimmer would have dearly loved the monument; as a practising physician it was all the more suitable he should have had it. But Albion Bicknell, a local landscape-painter who was helping to found the new Allston Club, which was to be a *truly* exclusive group (unlike the old Art Club), wrote his friend Elihu Vedder in New York on February 22nd, 1866: "I have had the pleasure of securing a commission for Quincy Ward a few days ago. Dr. Rimmer wanted the commission, but I ran him off the track. Dr. owes me one."

Rimmer, nevertheless, continued sculpture. He created a figure of Osiris, with two heads, one human and one a hawk's, the legs of which he was particularly proud of. It was condemned for its nudity and withdrawn from exhibition before it was widely seen. He made some other figures, soon after destroyed. He published in 1864 an ingenious and well-designed handbook, *Elements of Design*, the foreword for which was written by James Elliott Cabot, architect and literary executor of Emerson. Living in Chelsea, he painted portraits. For Sarmiento, the Argentine statesman, then consul in Boston, he cut two fine heads in marble—of Horace Mann, the great educator, whose system Sarmiento was to emulate in his own country, and a fine beardless Lincoln.

At the New York home of Mrs. Anne Lynch Botta, who held elaborate weekly *conversaziones*, at one of which Rimmer was asked to lecture, he met Peter Cooper, who offered him the post of Director of the School of Design for Women at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. Recent disappointments in Boston made him look to New York with some eagerness. He left Boston in 1866, taking the occasion to resign formally from the Art Club, with which he connected his professional failure. Prospects in New York looked bright; Mr. Cooper and his son-in-law Abram Hewitt seemed disposed to offer him a free hand. Rimmer was experienced in teaching and had his plans

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well worked out. Too well for Peter Cooper. The philanthropist's chief aim for his school was to prepare poor young ladies to earn a decent living by commercial art, mainly textile design, wood-engraving and some tinting of photographs. Rimmer had a sound background in lithography, etching and engraving. He had proposed an elaborate plan for teaching textile design at the request of a Boston millowner. He was well versed in the practical arts, but he was also an artist and assumed that he'd been hired to teach art. He thought Mr. Cooper's young ladies should know anatomy, proportion and the relation between basic forms. "You are a very hard man to manage," Mr. Cooper soon told him. Rimmer replied that he had come to manage, not to be managed. In June 1868 his classes were attacked in the *Tribune* and he defended himself vigorously. His proposal to the trustees of Cooper Union in that year's annual report shows a high sense of executive imagination, but the Union was no place to carry out so broad a scheme. However, M. Armand Dumaresq, sent here on a French mission to report on American art education, in May 1870 wrote of his inspection of the School of Design: "I do not hesitate to say that I should be happy to see a like teacher in France; his lectures leave few gaps, and these would be easy to fill."

In 1870, Rimmer's appointment as Director of the School was not renewed. Abram Hewitt offered him the same salary of three thousand a year to accept a subordinate position, with less work. Although strongly urged to remain by Mr. Perkins and others, he proudly refused and returned to Boston. Although he did little sculpture in New York (an *Endymion* and a *Chaldean Shepherd*, both destroyed in the plaster) and but few paintings, he considered his four years there the happiest of his life. Here at last he was on an equal footing with his peers, and felt little of the anxiety and isolation of Quincy and East Milton, where he had been forced into a meagre practice to keep a few hours a week open for sculpture and painting.

Back in Boston, it was suggested that he open a drawing-school with William Morris Hunt, dean of Boston art. Hunt had first proposed this some years before; now he revived the idea with hope that support might be obtained from the Commonwealth. Hunt was Rimmer's opposite; from earliest youth he had been favored by family and fortune. He it was who had brought the Barbizon painters to America after working with Couture and Millet. He introduced Barye bronzes to Boston, had a devoted personal following and all the portrait commissions he wanted. But he too knew how lonely and provincial the American Athens really was, and felt genuinely attracted to Rimmer. They were even friends, of a sort. Hunt sent him pupils to learn drawing. Rimmer posed for the

hands of a posthumous portrait of Abraham Lincoln which Hunt painted for the State of Massachusetts (to be lost in the fire of 1872), and named his favorite daughter Caroline Hunt. But both men had too strong personalities ever to agree; nothing came of the proposal for a joint school. They taught alone; each with ardent disciples, mostly women. Rimmer preached the probity of line, Hunt the enveloping suggestiveness of color. Rimmer felt Hunt could not draw, Hunt believed Rimmer could not paint. When Hunt obtained the big commissions for murals in the new Albany State Capital, he asked Rimmer to aid him in the precision of his anatomy. But Rimmer promptly made impertinent corrections in his formal composition. Hunt paid him a hundred dollars for his time. Rimmer had pretensions or at least ambitions to be a muralist on his own, but Boston which was barely convinced he could sculpt would certainly not permit him to paint, at least in public. He exhibited so few pictures in his lifetime, that few people at his death knew that he had ever painted.

Aside from the *Gladiator*, only two of Rimmer's sculptures have been cast in bronze. Both were inspired by his lifelong moral obsession with the animal nature of man. As a symbol of royal power and the kingly ideal, he worshipped the leonine. *Fighting Lions* is a subject close to Barye, whose bronzes Hunt brought to Boston by 1861, but it is not treated at all in the Barye manner. There is a willful confusion in the tossed manes, in the small bestial features, a snarling ferocity which is scarcely monumental, but which shows a very close observation of nature, an almost lyric extension of intense violence, all the more peculiar and personal since it is on so small a scale.

*The Dying Centaur* again shows his physical ache, the wrench of the cerebral against the muscular animal. Its conception anticipates a similar composition of Rodin's, and Gutzon Borglum was fond of comparing the two artists. Rimmer even knocked hands from their arms, as in the *Centaur* and *Osiris*, partly perhaps to suggest a kinship with ruined and romantic antiquity, but in the *Centaur* at least, to heighten its strain and pathos, to intensify the agonized, unattainable grasping and unresolved struggle in the dual nature of man.

Rimmer lectured publicly and privately, in Boston, three series in Providence, and at the National Academy of Design in New York, at Yale and Worcester. When the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston was started in 1877 he was asked to teach art-anatomy twice a week, and he also instructed in modelling, but more as an aid to drawing in the round than as sculpture. Some of his lectures were carefully reported in the press, and are excellent records of his provocative and stimulating method. Mrs. William Aspinwall Tappan (Caroline Stur-

g's), a cultivated Bostonian in the milieu of Henry James and Henry Adams, placed two thousand dollars with the treasurer of Harvard College to pay for the publication of his lectures on artistic anatomy. He spent the summer of 1876 at Union, New Hampshire, putting on paper the residual information gathered since he had started his studies forty years since. The eighty-one plates, exquisitely drawn with a fine, hard gray pencil, are perhaps his most precious legacy. They were printed by the heliotype process in 1877, which did them something less than full justice; and have been reprinted several times since. In them we have the essence of his teaching, with its combination of realistic analysis, eccentricity and imagination. As a teacher in America, Rimmer ranks with Eakins and Robert Henri.

In March 1875, ten years after the *Hamilton*, he was hired for two thousand dollars to make a model for an heroic figure of *Faith* to be placed on top of the huge Pilgrim Monument for Plymouth, conceived in 1856 by the architect Hammat Billings and completed by his brother Joseph. The pose was dictated. After Rimmer had made an interesting nude, lightly covered with drapery (which recalls the female proportions he so much admired in the Athenaeum's copy of the Medici Venus), Billings turned over his work to a plasterer named Edward Perry, who for three hundred dollars "made it over" to the architect's satisfaction. The execution of the tinkered figure, which had little connection with sculpture of any kind, cost thirty thousand. It was Rimmer's last great disappointment.

To cap this tale of Yankee bad luck, he became involved in plans for a scientific aquarium which went bankrupt before it could open. He permitted the use of his name in a dubious photo-sculpture concern. He invented a self-registering counter for street-car conductors, a new type of gun-lock and an unbreakable trunk. Always miserably poor, he imagined a pot of gold might be found to relieve him of the weight of an ailing wife, three daughters and his own debts.

He always had wanted to paint, he always painted, but during his life showed so little that he was never considered a painter at all. He told his daughter that in their bright future which never came: "*We will revel in paint.*" His later pictures have a mastery of their medium (although many are wrecked by the use of bitumen) wholly unexpected for an amateur. Some of his most disturbing dreams are expertly achieved in terms of painting. But he was so careless of his pigment, and his heirs seem to have so little prized his work, that hardly a sixth of his recorded paintings seem to have survived.

His favorite play was *The Tempest*. He loved Beethoven and the music of the Catholic Church. Job was his ideal, and he prized Blake

above Michelangelo. He had no desire to go to Europe, since it would have separated him from his family. He wanted to take the money offered for the trip and settle in some quiet place to work at sculpture and painting, but it was not forthcoming for so modest a purpose. He had slight interest in artists of his time. As for politics, personalities did not interest him; he had so much suffering in his own life that personal tragedy did not seem impressive; but he was deeply concerned with great principles and large forces. Throughout his writings may be found acute and passionate remarks of a kind of Christian Socialism. One of his last published designs was occasioned by a strike in Fall River. The Boston bankers claimed they had everything to lose, since they had risked all the money to operate the mills. Rimmer showed an idealized workman's family entitled *The Poor Man Has Nothing to Lose*.

In May 1879 he suffered a general breakdown, and rested at home in Chelsea where he had lately charge of a night drawing-school. Moved to a daughter's house in South Milford, he died there the 20th of August, aged sixty-three. He is buried in the Milton Cemetery, on Lilac Path, near the grave of the great Abolitionist Wendell Phillips, who had written that his *Hamilton* "taught the majesty of repose." William Morris Hunt died from overexertion less than three weeks later. On September 10th young Dan French, who always remained devoted to Rimmer's memory and years later, in 1906, saw to it that the *Gladiator* was finally put in bronze, wrote to Mrs. Thomas Ball, the sculptor's wife, then in Italy. "The poor long-suffering doctor! His was an unhappy and unsuccessful life. He just missed being great."

Memorial exhibitions of Hunt and Rimmer, and the first American exhibition of William Blake, followed each other at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1880.

## MR

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## A Year of French Politics and Theatre

AFTER A YEAR of Europe, especially after a year of France, it is necessary to go home and lie down, to take one's ease in the slower pace of the New World, to gather strength for another assault on the Old World.\* In business and manufacturing, I am sure the New World outdoes the Old. But in literature and the theatre, even in politics when circumstances permit, France at least is full of bustling energy that puts the New World to shame. I speak first of energy and animation, not necessarily of quality. Faulkner and Hemingway hold their own among the writers of the world, and I doubt that any French collection of luminaries can outshine them. But France constitutes a more animated and responsive audience. In France a man of letters must be less of a lion and more of a lion-tamer if he is to survive. A Frenchman is likely to say what he has on his mind and as a result French literary controversies tend to be violent. I heard Ionesco booed at the Sorbonne for no other reason, I think, than that the students felt he had wasted their time. He was describing the reception of his latest play and he delightedly listed all the critics' contradictions. (Those critics who had been hostile before now wished that he would return to his brilliant early style.) His hearers seemed to feel that they could read the newspapers for themselves. They had come to hear something original and they were disappointed; so they booed. A speaker at an American university would probably have to trample on the flag to inspire similar hostility—or even similar animation.

When I speak of France, I mean Paris most of all. No one needs to be told again that French intellectual life is, to an extraordinary degree, centered in Paris. Everyone knows the old stories about the provincial professors who maintain apartments in Paris while they await the call to the Sorbonne or about the grudge that the provinces bear against the capital. Paris seems peculiarly constructed to appeal to every stranger's latent loyalty and sentimentality. I found my own still points of senti-

\* The year referred to ended last summer, although the events described are examined from the perspective of 1961.

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ment in the Rue des Rosiers, which is again, to a degree, a Jewish district, and in the statue of Montaigne near the Sorbonne. What drew me to Montaigne was the inscription. He belonged to France, he said, primarily because he belonged to Paris, this cosmopolitan city which is one of the adornments of the world. The present tense still applies.

Paris's leading quality is its diversity, and it is precisely this diversity that inspires the vitality and pugnacity of its intellectual life. Still a cosmopolitan city, Paris is the world's largest university town, and it knows no color line. Even the effort to retain Algeria is based on the premise that Algeria is a part of France itself and that a Frenchman is a Frenchman, no matter what color his skin is. Just a few minutes near the Sorbonne will show the greatest diversity. One needs only to watch the passersby or to listen to the *mélange* of tongues.

Its extraordinary diversity makes Paris a center for literary experiment and political eccentricity as well as the homeland for spiritual exiles from every nation. The leading Parisian dramatists include Samuel Beckett (born in Ireland) and Eugène Ionesco (born in Rumania). If a native Frenchman is to be ranked with them, it is Jean Genet, who has thoroughly exiled himself from bourgeois humanity. Paris is the first place to which literary and theatrical wares are brought from every land. Here *The Leopard* appears in translation before the United States reads it, and here *A Taste of Honey* is staged in French before New York is privileged to hear its homely Manchester English. While hostilities continue over the American production of *Mother Courage*, Paris is becoming indifferent to Jean Vilar's repertory presentation of this play.

Paris is the logical home of the Théâtre des Nations, which annually brings theatrical companies from the whole world over. The great powers seem reluctant to compete with their inferiors, and so neither the United States nor the Soviet Union sent a dramatic production last year. (Both, however, sent companies in 1961.) Poland and East Germany were represented, and so Paris saw some theatre from the other half of the world. Similar principles operate in the International Association of Theatre Critics, which evidently has its permanent home in Paris. The Soviet Union does not belong, and American participation is modest. At last year's meeting I was one of two Americans present. Other nations are better equipped to take advantage of Parisian diversity. Poland and Czechoslovakia sent delegates whose personal affability made it seem a matter of indifference that real communication was impossible. The irrepressible conflict never arose directly. It came close to the

## *A Year of French Politics and Theatre*

surface only once, during a discussion of the training of the drama critic. The two Americans had, in typically quixotic fashion, spoken frankly of the accidental circumstances that govern the training and especially the selection of an American drama critic. Then a Western friend of the East called upon the representatives of the "Eastern democracies" to report on conditions at home. They told us that in their countries aspirants to drama criticism study for a degree that certifies them as critics; anyone who has the degree is assured of a post as a reviewer, and nepotism, favoritism, or any appointment made for the wrong reasons is unheard of. The Americans wondered how all those posts were created and, in general, we felt that we got just what we deserved for being frank. (The other American wrote a comic summary of this encounter for *Variety*.) Again, I owe it to Paris that I participated in this East-West communication—or non-communication.

This conference brought other international patterns into focus. The Cuban delegate quickly realized what opportunities these meetings offered, and he immediately circulated a mimeographed account of theatrical activities in his native land. The Cubans followed by giving a party. The only other reception had been given by a Parisian critic, and, on that occasion, I was told that representatives of one Eastern nation had stayed away because the address was on a street named after a former king of their nation. International diversity was in high gear that week.

I grant that diversity and consequent quarrelsomeness are not French monopolies. Americans, too, have their hostilities but seldom in matters of permanent importance. Collectively, we may get excited over matters of the moment, but not over politics or literature. The weeklies that do most of our book-reviewing for us reflect a similar indifference to literary controversy; certainly, they are unwilling to stir up any arguments. Of course, we had our debate over the Bollingen Award, but to have only one such fight in a dozen years would be a disgracefully poor record for France. When one of our reviewing weeklies published my account of the controversy over Schwarz-Bart's *The Last of the Just*, I think much of the interest derived from the curiosity value of a fight over so piddling a concern as literature. In France the sort of thing that might among us stimulate a controversy in *Partisan Review* would be a public matter, right on the surface. Normally French politics also stimulates public controversies. But France is not now normal.

France now has the public side of its politics in a deep freeze, and the peculiar limits on political debate have very likely quickened the

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pace of argument over the arts. French political action has become a peculiar, conspiratorial clash by night, occasionally breaking out in some sensational event or disclosure. We had a variety of political sensations when I was in France—most of them originating with the Right. One of the Right's more spectacular gestures occurred just as I arrived in France. While I was in transit, de Gaulle made the celebrated speech in which he promised self-determination to Algeria. Before I landed two days later, a Rightist organization had gone to work by night, and every wall in Paris bore the chalked legend "de Gaulle = Mendès," meaning that de Gaulle would lose Algeria just as Mendès-France had lost Indo-China. On some walls the authors had added their signature, "Jeune Nation," and their symbol, a cross within a circle. Passing wits changed a few of these signatures to "Jeune Nazisme" and turned the cross into a swastika. For many months this wall writing remained as silent testimony to the strength that even this odd Rightist group could muster. (Wall writing is a characteristic expression of French individualism. A favorite inscription in the provinces is "*Le roi, pourquoi pas?*" which, I suppose, moves passing wits to erase the last word.)

The Right makes sudden, dramatic gestures, appealing to public fear and public attention but deriving from conspiratorial origins. In their own strange fashion the Rightists embody the French flair for the dramatic, and they hold the stage during the continuing paralysis of legitimate French politics. Accordingly, a fanatic of the Right charged that a Senator of the Mendès-France Left had engaged him to effect a faked attempt at assassination. A less likely accomplice could scarcely be imagined than this Rightist who, when the police booked him and asked what his vocation was, replied: "I defend France." Yet he insisted that the Leftist Senator had tried to win his support by urging: "You must do this for my friend Mendès-France."

The Rightists infiltrated a farmers' demonstration, producing some violence and a few cries of "*Algérie française*." I witnessed a farmers' demonstration that they did not infiltrate, although it was reported that they had tried. The farmers, small, dark, sad-faced, seedy-looking, had been carefully lined up by their leaders, and they marched silently into the center of town and dispersed. This ghostly procession seemed unrelated to reality, let alone to power.

By now the Right has mounted several attempts to seize power. If the Right enjoys backing in the Army and even some grass-roots support in unexpected places, it still could not maintain any of its representa-

## *A Year of French Politics and Theatre*

tives in control. One measure of its weakness is its isolation from intellectual life. (I grant that our Republican Party is similarly isolated, but such things mean less here.) Some elderly men of letters, like Mauriac, Romains, and Gabriel Marcel, support de Gaulle's policy in Algeria, but I know of no literary man who is further right than de Gaulle. The literary Right disappeared from view with Leon Daudet and Charles Maurras. We may get a few idiosyncratic gestures of conservatism from writers like Jean Anouilh, but most of them are self-consciously represented as mere personal crotchets, as in *L'Hurluberlu* (performed here as *The Fighting Cock*). I suppose Barrault is a Gaullist, but other leading directors, Jean Vilar and Roger Planchon, belong to the Left and to the Brechtian orbit.

The gestures of the Left have been verbal and literary, or at least they have had intellectual associations. When the Left operates underground, it is not in order to break surface occasionally and say "Boo," but rather to give concrete aid to the Algerian rebels. When the government exposed an underground movement, its leader turned out to be Francis Jeanson, an existentialist professor of philosophy and friend of Sartre. Jeanson escaped, but a number of those arrested had formerly belonged to the Grenier, the celebrated local theatre of Toulouse. The more typical gesture of the intellectual Left has not been direct aid to the rebels but verbal criticism of official policy—in Sartre's magazine and in such weeklies as *L'Express* and *France Observateur*. University youth generally reflects the position of the Left. Public statements and actions by university students have expressed hostility to the Algerian war. A year ago classes were briefly halted by a nationwide student strike for draft deferment. At the university where I did most of my lecturing faculty opinion was divided. One colleague told me that the students were striking for dishonorable reasons, but another spoke publicly of "the strike, which we all support." The strike obviously reflected student apathy (at best) toward the war. In addition, student organizations all over France endorsed statements criticizing the Algerian campaign. The endorsement at my university was delayed when outsiders broke up a student meeting with exploding firecrackers and shouts of "*Algérie française!*" Still, students were voicing their opinions more frankly than adults.

The leading intellectuals came forward to express themselves on particular issues, not on the war itself. Françoise Sagan complained of the brutal treatment of a witness in a trial. Sartre's magazine presented documented accounts of atrocities in Algeria, and when Sartre himself

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commented on the Algerian war in his new play, *The Condemned of Altona* (*Les Séquestrés d'Altona*), he particularly made an issue of the use of torture. (The government, at the same time, published illustrated accounts of atrocities committed by the other side.) Even when the intellectuals signed the celebrated manifesto of several months ago, they were still attacking the war only obliquely by defending their countrymen's right not to serve. The fact remains that the normal avenues of political action and protest are not functioning, and so French political life continues sluggish. In some intellectual quarters a certain indifference has set in. I can provide a curious instance. On the night when de Gaulle made the speech that broke the 1960 *ultra* revolt in Algiers, I was having dinner with other colleagues at the home of a senior professor. I had expected that I would thereafter be able to paint a moving picture of how France listened to its leader's every word. Instead, I was the first to notice that we had missed him on the radio. Of course, everyone present wanted him to put down the revolt and was sure he would succeed, but no one cared very much to know what phrases he would use to do it. The French are at arm's length from exercising their full political functions, and they are becoming resigned to this condition.

In the absence of the old vigor of the political parties French intellectuals look to the weeklies I have mentioned to give them their verbal substitute for political action. Also, the satirical *Canard Enchaîné* is invariably described as "must" reading for French teachers at all levels. I was reminded of that conventional statement during a cocktail party at which a lecturer in classics held forth with tidbits culled from that week's *Canard*, which he had seen before the rest of us—a little like the American academic who helpfully summarizes the cartoons in the current week's *New Yorker*. But *Canard* has more bite because it finds nothing and no one so funny as the head of the state. In one issue I counted five caricatures of de Gaulle on page one, one on page two, four on page three, one on page four, and one on page five. *Canard* used to specialize in apocryphal conversations between de Gaulle (called Mongénéral) and Prime Minister Debré (called Mondebré). One classic exchange goes like this: "What time is it, Mondebré?" "Any time you please, Mongénéral."

*Canard* has no program, only a sharp eye for absurdity and a vague bent toward anarchism. For this reason it is, to an outsider, one of the more startling facts of French literary life that a leading editor of *Canard*, Morvan Lebesque, serves as drama critic of the conservative

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weekly *Carrefour*. The French take such odd relationships in stride, but even among them confusions arise. In the latest volume of his memoirs, de Gaulle incorrectly calls *Canard* Communist; for weeks *Canard* threatened him with a libel suit and then became tired of pursuing this chimera. But *Canard* has been overlooked in the occasional suppression of weekly papers. When the government chose to invoke an old law protecting the President of the Republic against abuse, the paper singled out, almost at random, was a weekly of the extreme Right, *Rivarol*. (Or perhaps the choice was not so random. The Left may be equally abusive, but the Right furnishes the real, immediate threat.) The editors of *Rivarol* protested that *Canard* was a more logical target for prosecution; the editors of *Canard* graciously acknowledged the compliment.

These are no more than the facts of French public life. But French life is not only characterized by such oddities; it is composed of such oddities. The best of the weeklies, *L'Express*, combines similar curiosities. Its editor opposes the war, but he also opposes desertion. A typical spokesman for the paper is the brilliant cartoonist Siné, who conducts a private war against the military, the police, and the clergy; but, until recently, *L'Express* published two weekly columns by the Catholic dean of French letters, François Mauriac. *L'Express* reflects the views of Mendès-France, whom de Gaulle is said to respect, but this distinction does not save it from being one of the most frequent victims of arbitrary seizure. When a weekly is seized for such an offense as attacking the military or presenting the problem of desertion, the authorities destroy every copy; the next day, a censored issue appears at an advanced price to compensate for the destruction of the impounded copies, but a considerable loss is always sustained. Incredibly, in this democratic nation, in which the most savage comments upon the head of the state continue to be published, so many papers were being confiscated that the government seemed to be trying to achieve a balance between the seizure of leftist and rightist journals. Still, no one can dispute the preeminence of *L'Express* and *France Observateur* in this department. This oddest of all governments does not show a comparable interest in seizing the Communist weeklies, *France Nouvelle* and the Sunday *Humanité*. The favorite daily paper for seizure has been the fellow-travelling *Libération*, not the Communist *Humanité*. Perhaps the explanation is simply that the independent leftist papers have more power to mold opinion.

Those intellectuals who care about politics convey their criticisms in jest, as in *Canard* and in the political revues. In the best revue during

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the year I spent in France, *Vive de . . .*, the title is meant to suggest "Vive de Gaulle," but this is a red herring, because the principal song is "Vive Debré," in honor of the rather dim figure who is Prime Minister of the Republic; the words are just "Vive Debré," over and over again. Another song is a duet between two lovers who are separated by politics. He is a Communist, and she is M. R. P.; they compromise by joining de Gaulle's U. N. R., which has no principles at all. Over in London I was brought back to normality by a merry little revue which commented upon nothing serious and resembled our own merry little revues. In Paris revues must help take up the slack in a slow political season.

Robbed of much of their traditional political excitement, the French have transferred some of their animation to arguments over literature and the theatre. I grant that the French have always been coming to blows about literature, as Victor Hugo could testify, but I think that the current scene exhibits this pattern to an unusual extent. I concede also that the extraordinary prestige of the intellectual in French life helps to make literary battles worth fighting. The French man of letters is not only a writer; he is, like Sartre and Mauriac, a public figure as well. He takes responsibility and he is rewarded for it by an unfeigned respect that is paid him. In consequence, cultural events are public events in France. If the French can take the public importance of art for granted, this attitude is still startling to an American.

France is a sort of never-never land where the issues you and I care about become matters of moment. As I have mentioned, the French fought over André Schwarz-Bart's *The Last of the Just*, and when it won the Goncourt Prize, one of the large evening papers attacked the choice on the front page—on literary grounds. Much of the hostility was based on an ill-considered charge of plagiarism, and the author of the charge became the victim of a brilliant, hilarious attack in *France Observateur*. The victim had casually displayed, as if it were his own, a great store of Jewish learning supplied to him by a literary enemy of Schwarz-Bart. I fear his standing has never quite recovered from *Observateur's* reference to him as "M. Parinaud, whom I have the pleasure of seeing every Friday night at the synagogue." And what paper offered a more discreet reservation to the award, without malice and strictly on the grounds of literary style? Why, the wildly irresponsible *Canard!*

When some lines attributed to Corneille appeared on one of the national examinations, *Le Monde*, the Parisian equivalent of the New

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York *Times*, objected on page one that the lines were of inferior quality and did not deserve the serious attention they were getting. But the real scoop belonged to one of the literary weeklies (*Figaro Littéraire*, I think) which took pleasure in reporting that leading authorities did not, in fact, attribute the lines to Corneille. With luck, such an issue might, in our benighted land, have been reported in *College English* at best.

The Comédie Française staged one of its frequent crises. The daily *Figaro* ran a lengthy symposium, but when the company reached its nadir with a rather frozen production of *Phèdre*, the morning *Combat*, a newspaper with which Camus had been associated, proclaimed on page one that Racine had died a second time and advised the Comédie to go out of business. The Comédie's star attraction, Robert Hirsch, fearing he would no longer be permitted to act the comedies in which he excelled, refused to be presented to de Gaulle and André Malraux at the opening of Giraudoux's *Electre*. The fate of Molière's company is important, but it is startling to see people acting on this assumption.

Occasionally the theatre became a political football. Barrault came to be regarded as the embodiment of Gaullism in the theatre, and his first production at the state-subsidized theatre newly given him, the Théâtre de France, became a test for cultural Gaullism. The first play was *Tête d'Or*, a work of Paul Claudel's youth never performed in France. It was a poetic success and a dramatic oddity, a play resting upon that contradiction in terms, a manufactured mythology, weaving together strands of Claudel's early Nietzschean stance, Christian tradition, and the life story of some such conqueror as Tamburlaine. What does one make of a scene in which the hero, his arms wasted by their work in battle, rescues a princess from the tree on which she has been crucified, removing the nails with his teeth? *Canard*, inevitably, was rather tickled by the spectacle, but most were won by the poetry, and the play became Barrault's most popular production. (He cannot revive it now because at least two of his actors signed the famous manifesto and are banned from working in a state theatre.) The conservative weekly *Carrefour* hoped for an unfavorable review and, failing to get one from Lebesque, published one in an editorial together with Lebesque's friendly notice. But Lebesque's approval had no connection with the disapproval of his publication, *Canard*. Truly a nation of individualists! (I admit that, in the New York *Herald Tribune*, Walter Kerr and John Crosby published, respectively, the most and the least favorable notices of Phil Silvers in *Do-Re-Mi*, but, then, neither one edits the paper.) A few months later, when Malraux urged that the Army fire on the *ultra*

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Rightist rebels in Algiers, the reactionary *Rivarol* pointed out that he could end the revolt without bloodshed: all he had to do was to bring down the company of *Tête d'Or* to perform for the rebels, who would promptly die of boredom.

The Sartre play was the center of another controversy. Malraux seemed to be anticipating its opening when, on a lecture tour in South America, he made a personal attack on Sartre. Since I have commented on this play elsewhere (*Midstream*, Winter 1960), it should suffice here to say that Sartre juxtaposes the guilty Germany of 1945 with the prosperous nation of 1959 by presenting a German officer who through isolation has kept all his early illusions intact. He adds an accusation against France by making his German officer resemble a French officer who has tortured Algerian rebels. The German justifies himself by believing that Germany would be destroyed by the victorious allies, but obviously the Frenchman of 1959 has no such justification. The play is powerful and complex, and knowing observers found that its virtues survived an indifferent performance. The daily press, however, fell upon the play, with the notorious and influential Jean Jacques Gautier of *Figaro* in full cry, leading the reviewers. He complained: "I want plays I can understand." (Gautier is said to be the most widely read reviewer. He is certainly the most hated by intellectuals, even here. When I mentioned his name at a recent MLA meeting, a professor at Pennsylvania State University automatically hissed.) Since the play was long, *Figaro*'s cartoonist showed a man in the audience growing a beard, and a Rightist weekly showed the audience falling asleep.

The weekly press came to Sartre's rescue. In *L'Express*, Mauriac, no friend of Sartre's, replied that he wanted to hear anything Sartre had to say and that he wanted critics who understand. To the same issue Siné contributed cartoons which were intended to explain the play to Gautier. Gabriel Marcel conveyed his admiration, adding that the players' diction left much to be desired and that he looked forward to reading the text. In his review "old Hindenburg" was reported as "old Hindemith," and so the diction must indeed have been indistinct when he was in attendance. Other weeklies were less sympathetic, but even *Rivarol*'s reviewer confessed a certain admiration up to the moment when it became certain that Sartre was attacking the French military in Algeria. A British critic thought he detected a defense of Germany, something comparable to Hollywood's effort to improve Germany's standing among the nations by bleaching Marlon Brando's hair and giving him a German uniform. But Sartre had established his criticism of the

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French soldier whom, in a sense, the German soldier represented, and this parallel prevented any endorsement of Germany. The serious defenders of the play prevailed, and its run lasted the whole season. Later I saw in Rome an Italian production that better conveyed the spirit of the antagonisms Sartre had dramatized.

The real war of the theatres was going on elsewhere in Paris. The fight over the Comédie was, in a measure, political. The fight over the Sartre play was, in a sense, a war waged in behalf of the theatre against the Philistine outsiders. But the war that has really divided the serious theatre in Paris has set the Brechtians against the theatre of the absurd. Brecht is a living influence in France. Many volumes of his plays are available there, and occasional productions are mounted. Last year Vilar revived his *Mother Courage*; the season that followed saw two new Brecht productions. But the greatest stimulus to Brecht's prestige in Paris has been provided by the visits of the Berliner Ensemble Theatre, from East Berlin. This admirable company visited in 1960 at the Théâtre des Nations, bringing four productions: *Mother Courage* and *Galileo*, which had been seen previously, and two new stagings—*The Mother* (based on Gorki's novel) and *The Resistible Ascension of Arturo Ui* (Hitler's rise to power seen as an episode in the life of a Chicago gangster).

*The Mother* was done in the obvious and appropriate manner that revealed its true nature as a dramatized guide book to Party organizers. Brecht's strictures on religion seemed to have been expanded, and, at the end, newsreel shots of Lenin and Mao warmed the hearts of those so inclined. (Stalin and Khrushchev were both omitted, evidently in the interest of fair play.) A single "Boo" in the audience set off an answering shout and quickened the drama of the occasion. I should add that the production was excellent of its kind, but it was of a kind surely inferior to *Arturo Ui*.

*Mother Courage* and *Galileo* must stand first as fully realized human dramas, but *Arturo Ui* is a distinctive piece of raucous, alienated, wildly distorted satire, exhibiting Hitler, Hindenburg, Dollfuss, and others as citizens of Chicago and Cicero, Illinois. Both makeup and performances are extravagant, and the play's strength is drawn, not from coherence, but from individual scenes, especially the one in which an aged Shakespearean actor teaches Ui the art of oratory with the help of speeches from *Julius Caesar*. Ui postures, adopts the hands-on-fly position that Hitler favored, gains confidence, and finally bursts through the glassless mirror before which he has been standing. Brecht uses Shakespeare again

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when *Ui* courts Dullfoot's widow in a manner reminiscent not only of Hitler's seizure of Austria but also of the courtship scene in *Richard III*. As *Ui*, Ekkehard Schall has all of Hitler's most familiar gestures, appropriately, maniacally distorted—combined with a vigorous drive toward extremes of depression and jubilation. Everything is painted in the gaudiest colors, and the primary effect of *Arturo Ui* is achieved in the boldness of its presentation.

Still other Brecht productions have been available to Parisians. While I was in Paris, the Piccolo Teatro of Milan visited with its production of *The Three-Penny Opera*. Here Brecht himself had been adapted, along lines which he had approved. The action of the play had been moved to America in 1913. The director, Giorgio Strehler, had found two immediate advantages in this shift. First, he looked back and stirred some recollections of silent film comedies: some sets had a vaguely sepia hue, Tiger Brown's men resembled the Keystone Cops, and one member of Mackie's gang looked like Chaplin. Second, he looked forward and considered his characters, who were to be regarded as Italian immigrants in the United States, to be virtually identical with the more prosperous mobsters of the Prohibition Era: accordingly, Mackie's gang reminded us of the over-dressed thugs of certain American gangster films, and the wedding, set in a garage, suggested the garish banquet scene from *Little Caesar*.

Brecht is now one of the great names in the French theatre. Even Sartre has attempted Brechtian techniques, most obviously in requiring his actors to exhibit Brechtian alienation in the "flashback" sequences of *The Condemned of Altona*. But Sartre is Brechtian in a more profound way as well. His long interview in *L'Express* (translated in *Evergreen Review* No. 11) implies that he has undertaken a more fundamental alienation in the play. Just as Brecht transfers Hitler to Chicago and (in another play) to Latin America, so Sartre has, with less distortion, transferred a French soldier of the Algerian campaign to the German army of World War II. Accordingly, Sartre told his interviewers: "The ideal of the Brechtian theatre would be for the public to be like a group of ethnologists who suddenly discover a savage tribe, draw near and exclaim with amazement: 'We are these savages.'" It was just this discovery which had so upset *Rivarol's* reviewer of Sartre's play.

But Sartre is only an eclectic Brechtian. Few French playwrights may confidently be identified as thoroughgoing Brechtians. Frequently, however, one hears the epithet "Brechtian" applied to a particular play, often to one adapted from a novel. "Epic" is, after all, a narrative technique.

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The leading self-proclaimed Brechtian in the drama is Arthur Adamov, whose most recent work is a dramatization of Gogol's *Dead Souls*. Adamov is a former exponent of the theatre of the absurd, whose defenders now regard him as the Benedict Arnold of the movement. He is now said to regard Shakespeare, Chekhov, and Brecht as the three greatest dramatists of all time. His *Dead Souls* employs lantern slides of the Russian countryside, Brechtian exaggeration in the presentation of character, and a Marxist view of the social scene, but it is a long, plodding drama, given life by its remarkable production. And that brings us to the real strength of Brecht's influence in France.

The prominence of Brechtian critics and directors makes up for the relative absence of Brechtian playwriting. The critics flourish especially in a well-edited quarterly, *Théâtre populaire*, but their work is sometimes to be seen in such weeklies as *France Observateur*. Their drama criticism has won sufficient attention for Ionesco, in behalf of the rival movement in the theatre, to declare war on them. In *Improvisation, or the Shepherd's Chameleon*, Ionesco shows himself in his study besieged by three critics who tell him how to write. The first two are recognizable portraits of Brechtian critics, who recommend alienation effects and put up signs all over the place, including the sign "Poet" for Ionesco himself; the third resembles Gautier. When the Brechtians proclaim the age of Brecht, the third critic holds out for the age of (Henry) Bernstein; they compromise on "the B Century." (In a London production, the two B's were Brecht and Brattigan. To an American producer I would recommend Brecht and Behrman.) Ionesco quotes Aristotle to the Brechtians, and he is told that Adamov anticipated Aristotle. (The London production pointlessly substituted "Wesker" for "Adamov." Wesker is, in a literary sense, angry, but no one is especially angry with him.) When *Improvisation* was staged in New York, under its subtitle, none of the reviewers seemed to know what was going on. The critics in the play were generally described as "pedantic," and that was all. Family quarrels do not travel well. But the quarrel has continued, and Ionesco has reminded us just how savage a French literary fight can be. Writing again of an identifiable Brechtian, he has said that the man "is a Marxist. He is also a *petit-intellectuel bourgeois*. He is also a homosexual. That is his business." If that is so, then Ionesco need not make it ours.

Vilar's work shows Brechtian influence, but the most committed Brechtian director is Roger Planchon, who runs a provincial theatre in Lyons but has won fame in the capital and gone on to play in Rome,

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Edinburgh, London, and other foreign cities. I have seen four of his productions—the two parts of Shakespeare's *Henry IV* (the first called *Henry IV* and the second retitled *Falstaff*), Adamov's version of *Dead Souls*, and *The Three Musketeers* (adapted by Planchon himself but without credit on the program). Planchon is a comic genius, very inventive and quite dedicated to giving everything a Marxist twist. His *Henry IV* is a free adaptation, not so free as Brecht's adaptation of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, but still a distinctive product of Planchon's imagination. The words are almost all Shakespeare's, in a very plain translation, but the action is Planchon's, and it transforms the play. Prince Hal is a cynical adventurer in this reading, and he pledges support to his father for the worst, not the best, of reasons. The scene in which the king calls Hal to account is typical. As he compares Hal to Richard II and narrates his shrewd, Machiavellian maneuvers against Richard, he recalls them with obvious pleasure, not with a regretful participant's austere impartiality. A faint smile plays over his face, and it is contagious. Hal, a bully like his father, begins to smirk, too, at the thought of the rightful king's deposition, and in a few minutes father and son are joyously united for any new chicanery that may offer itself. This is not the play Shakespeare created. The "I know you all" speech is eliminated even though it could easily be used to support Planchon's interpretation. The Archbishop of York's brief scene is expanded to unimaginable length by ingenious pantomime, and the Archbishop is painted as a fussy martinet. The anti-clerical note is struck also in a conspiratorial scene, enlivened by the presence of two friars who are spying on the conspirators. And, finally, at Shrewsbury Hal does not vanquish Hotspur in fair combat; instead, he requires help.

Obviously, what is very good Planchon is not very good Shakespeare. Next, we must say that Shakespeare is the greater artist, and perhaps that makes Planchon an enemy of art. Or is he? Actually his *Henry IV* is a new invention, and I am sure it is superior to the *Henry IV* of many directors more faithful to Shakespeare's intentions. Adding pantomime to Shakespeare is not an innovation of Planchon's. Like other directors, Sir Herbert Beerbohm-Tree added great amounts of pantomime—his Richard II sadly watched his dogs desert him and flock around the new king—and Shaw reports that much of it was quite good, if distracting. The difference in Planchon's additions is that they are coherent and that they are designed to subvert Shakespeare's intentions. His *Henry IV* shows the Middle Ages from a cynical, modern point of view—something like Falstaff's point of view. His Falstaff, played by the

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ingenious Jean Bouise, is a mean, lusty, dirty old man, not at all like the Father Christmas whom we sometimes find in this part. His Hal, played by Planchon himself, is a keen, unscrupulous operator, looking a little like a vicious Jack Lemmon. Planchon's *Henry IV*, then, is not Shakespeare, but it is a fascinating show of another sort.

Planchon has not failed to become involved in the same quarrels and contradictions that embroil other theatre people. Just recently an interviewer for an American magazine fed Ionesco a question about "the absurd idea" of dramatizing *Dead Souls*. Ionesco replied with some animadversions on the play's "political slant," based on hearsay, since he had not seen the play. And yet, in spite of apparent political differences Malraux has rewarded Planchon by making him consultant to the subsidized provincial theatres. Two years ago Kenneth Tynan asked, in the *New Yorker*, if Malraux would dare to recognize Planchon's talents. He dared to, and one publication reported: "*Planchon est sauvé!*"

The Brechtians dominate stagecraft and drama criticism, but, in France, they have yet to produce a major playwright. Serious playwriting in France is dominated by the dramatists of the absurd, by Ionesco and Beckett, and by Jean Genet, who is sometimes classified with them. The year I spent in France was the year of Ionesco's *The Rhinoceros*, a full-length play in which Ionesco diluted over four scenes the methods that had so well sustained his short plays. The short plays had been better reflections of their author and his technique; a single joke cannot be made to last for an entire evening. And so, in that season, this area of the drama was dominated not by Ionesco but by Genet.

Genet's *The Blacks* was performed early in the season, and late in the season it was succeeded by *The Balcony*. In France Genet gets the very best, the most devout productions. *The Blacks* was done by an African company directed by Roger Blin, who is best known as a director of Beckett's plays. This cast projected, with a violence foreign to more sophisticated actors, the savage resentment proper to an enslaved colonial people. *The Blacks* has Genet's customary ingredients—plays within the play and impulses toward impersonation and domination. The natives of some African colony perform a little entertainment for us, the well-intentioned whites of the theatre audience, and, incidentally, their leader addresses us. This enclosing action is brought to our attention again near the close of the evening when the play within the play is interrupted for a reported success in a revolt against the colonial authority. The actors briefly express their joy and then resume their performance. Part of the audience is on the stage—five representatives of the

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colonial power (Negroes wearing white masks) who watch the action from a balcony. The Negroes describe and re-enact a murder they have already carried out—the murder of a white woman. The account is inconsistent. Two different women seem to have been killed; the second, impersonated by an "Uncle Tom" Negro with the help of a "Little Eva" disguise, joins the colonialists in their white heaven. (If anyone cares, "Little Eva" is the mask on the cover of the Evergreen edition of this play.) The ambiguity apparently arises from the ritual nature of what is done. Every night a white is killed; this, for Genet, is at once the dream of the enslaved Negroes and the guilt-ridden nightmare of the colonialists. The same pattern of compensation by play-acting occurs also in Genet's *The Maids* and *The Balcony*.

I have devoted so much attention to telling what happens in *The Blacks* because the play inspired as much confusion as admiration. Even many who did not fully understand gave approval and, in particular, acknowledged the eloquence of the lyrical passages interpreting Negro dreams of hostility and revenge. Although Genet, like Beckett and Ionesco, is unpolitical, the Left applauded in deference to the play's anti-colonialism, but one reviewer on the Right felt obliged to remind his readers of the many benefits that colonialism had brought to unhappy savages. That, inevitably, was Gautier, who also complained of Planchon's disrespectful treatment of Cardinal Richelieu in *The Three Musketeers*. (Humorists wondered if Gautier was concerned about the church or about the fifty-franc note, on which Richelieu appears.)

With regard to Genet's *The Balcony*, I wish to comment principally on the austerity and professionalism of the production. Marie Bell, who is probably the first lady of the French theater, brought it into her own theatre, a big, boulevard theatre, the Paris equivalent of a Broadway playhouse. This remarkable woman had just completed a long run in a popular success in the same theatre, Félicien Marceau's *The Good Soup*. Then she went to London to play some classic roles, including *Phèdre*, and then she gave further evidence of her eclecticism by playing the lead in Genet's *avant-garde* play. A few weeks before, an American production had opened off-Broadway with what was evidently a fairly competent cast. By the time I saw the American version, many actors had been replaced, and the performance was rather uncertain. The play had been so cut as to increase its difficulty, in fact, so as to make the last scene unintelligible. And the conception seemed wrong. The characters who were later to be taken for a queen and her court were not being played from their own point of view; they were disorderly,

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trivial, and obvious. Paris, however, saw an austere and ceremonious performance by what was virtually an all-star cast, directed by Peter Brook. The American equivalents to the actors assembled for this occasion might have been Helen Hayes, Alfred Lunt, Lee J. Cobb, and Zero Mostel. The French actors included Miss Bell, Jacques Dacqmine, Roger Blin, and William Sabatier (who had just scored a great success playing in Barrault's production of *The Rhinoceros* the part that Mostel has over here). Need we observe that the *avant garde* commands extraordinary respect in France?

The Paris theatre season, then, provided all this and other events of interest—a wild little farce by Françoise Sagan, Vilar's productions of Strindberg's *Erik XIV* and an almost forgotten play by Marivaux (the two bright spots in what was not Vilar's year), and a full schedule of international offerings by the Théâtre des Nations, including such curious events as the Berliner Ensemble's four plays, the solemn Düsseldorf production of *The Rhinoceros*, a Brazilian version of Jules Renard's *Poil de carotte* that compared favorably with the revival by the Comédie Française, inspired Italian performances in the *commedia dell'arte* tradition, and a new Polish play featuring a manly, be-spectacled hero of the revolution (looking remarkably like a Trofimov I saw in a Ljubljana production of *The Cherry Orchard*).

The world has nothing else quite like the Théâtre des Nations. Its organizers clearly know whom to invite. Last year England was represented by Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop; this year England sends the equally vital English Stage Company of the Royal Court Theatre with the world premiere of a play by John Osborne. The diversity of the Théâtre des Nations fits perfectly into its Parisian environment; it is inconceivable anywhere else.

The Parisian scene is characterized most of all by animation, by a perpetual motion that never slows down. Every enthusiasm and every hostility finds a voice here. The effect is disorderly enough to explain why the French produced—and why they still revere—the order and the exaggerated calm of neo-classical drama. They needed a deliberate effort of will to control the natural turbulence of their lives; Racine obviously reflects both elements at once—turbulence as well as control. Uncontrolled, all that turbulence and its accompanying diversity tend to overwhelm reserved Americans. I have, however, been resting for nearly a year now and I am almost ready to go back.\*

\* Mr. Popkin is in France again this summer; he is preparing a sequel to this article for our next issue.

## *Earle Birney*

### ACTOPANS

*Do tell me what the ordinary Mex—*

Madam, there is a plaza in Actopan  
where ladies very usual beside most rigid hexagrams  
of chili peppers squat this moment  
and, in Ottomi gutturals not in Spanish lexicons,  
gossip while they scratch there in the open—

*But arent there towns in Mexico more av—?* Dear Madam  
Actopan is a town more average than mean,  
you may approach it on a sound macadam,  
yet prone upon the plaza's cobbles will be seen  
a brace of ancients, since no edict has forbad them,  
under separate serapes in a common pulque dream—

*But someone has to work to make a—* Lady,  
those ladies work at selling hexametric chili,  
and all their husbands, where the zocalo is shady  
routinely spin in silent willynilly,  
lariats from cactus muscles; as they braid they  
hear their normal sons in crimson shorts go shrilly

bouncing an oval basketball about the square—

*You mean that all the younger gener—?*

I mean this is a saint's day, nothing rare,  
a median saint, a medium celebration,  
while pigeon-walking down the plaza stair  
on tiny heels, from hexahemeric concentration

within the pyramidal church some architect  
of Cortez built to tame her antecedents—

*You mean that Mexico forgets her histor—?* Madam, I suspect  
that patterns more complex must have precedence:  
she yearns to croon in Harlem dialect  
but still her priest to Virgin Xipe prays for intercedence.

Actopans all are rounded with the ordinary,  
and squared much as they feel. *You mean—*  
they are more hexagon and more extraordinary  
than even you, dear lady, or than Egypt's queen.

## Daniel Aaron

### A Decade of Convictions: the Appeal of Communism in the 1930's

IN HIS EPILOGUE to *Exile's Return*, Malcolm Cowley described the joyless and desperate New Year's Eve parties that ushered in the Depression decade. One of his friends, after a night of party-going, "found himself in a strange sub-cellar joint in Harlem. The room was smoky and sweaty and ill-ventilated; all the lights were tinted green or red, and, as the smoke drifted across them, nothing had its own shape or color; the cellar was likely somebody's crazy vision of Hell; it was as if he was caught there and condemned to live in a perpetual nightmare." Out of this Tartarus, this capitalist nightmare, his friend stumbled into the harsh, cold, ugly, but clear light of a new day and a new era.

Cowley did not say that he and his friends were "reborn" in the religious sense, but their change in attitude, their exhilarating insights, their resolving of plaguy contradictions, followed the classical formula of the conversion experience. For one thing, it meant the end of romantic dichotomies: art and life, intellectual and Philistine, poetry and science, contemplation and action, literature and propaganda. The collapsing world and the new faith made such distinctions impertinent. Now Cowley demanded a humanistic art that would transform the rapidly changing world into myth without neglecting "the splendor and decay of capitalism and the growing self-awareness of the proletariat." No longer could the artist hold aloof from the class struggle. To do so involved the risk of "blinding and benumbing" himself. Embracing the cause of the workers might cut him off from his culture and his class; yet an alliance with the untutored and the dispossessed would put an end "to the desperate feeling of solitude and uniqueness that has been oppressing artists for the last two centuries." He had come, in the words William James used to describe Tolstoy's conversion, "to the settled

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## *A Decade of Convictions*

conviction . . . that his trouble had not been with life in general, not with the common life of common men, but with the life of the upper, intellectual, artistic classes, the life which he had personally always led, the cerebral life, the life of conventionality, artificiality, and personal ambition. He had been living wrongly and must change." Cowley predicted "great days ahead for artists" if they survived the struggle, kept "their honesty and vision," and learned "to measure themselves by the stature of their times."

Conservatives interpreted the literary turn to the Left as a new fad or as a conversion to "the Gospel of St. Marx." Radicals attributed the politicizing of the writer to economic necessity. Neither was wholly wrong, although each simplified the process. Personal inadequacy, the need to conform, the disease of careerism also drew writers into the radical movement. But the radical impulse before and after 1930 sprang from the motives that had prompted good men in all ages to denounce, in Hawthorne's words, "the false and cruel principles on which human society has always been based."

The elation and hope that stirred Cowley and his friends did not outlast the decade. They learned, like the narrator of *The Blithedale Romance*, "the most awful truth in Bunyan's book;—from the very gate of heaven is a by-way to the pit!" Yet after they had resigned from the Party of Hope, they might also have said with Hawthorne's disenchanted poet and would-be Utopian, "Whatever else I may repent of, therefore let it be reckoned neither among my sins nor follies that I once had faith and force enough to form generous hopes of the world's destiny."

It is not hard to understand why many writers who were once fascinated by Soviet Communism but who ultimately became disenchanted should now feel the need to divulge the "baser drives" that made the "Soviet myth" so appealing and to play down the objective reasons for their temporary aberration. The apostate must confess his delinquencies if he sincerely wishes to be readmitted into the American Establishment, and many liberal intellectuals felt obliged to seek absolution, to explain to the world and to themselves why they had been deluded into excusing the deceptions and cruelties of a false faith.

Unquestionably, a number of them entered the movement for less highminded reasons than they supposed. No man, as Jonathan Edwards knew, is immune to "the labyrinthine deceptions of the human heart." Yet who in retrospect can deny that the situation at home and abroad during the thirties justified a critical appraisal of the social and the

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political order? Who can question the sincerity and magnanimity of those hundreds of artists and intellectuals who took upon themselves the task of saving mankind from poverty and war? Communism's appeal can never be understood if it is considered merely an escape for the sick, the frustrated, and the incompetent or a movement of fools and knaves. Not the "aberrations of individuals" drew men to Communism in the 1930's, but the "aberrations of society."

The Great Depression, with its hunger marches, its Hoovervilles, its demoralized farmers, its nomads and park sleepers, its angry workers, its joyless youth, and bankrupt entrepreneurs was not the projection of sick personalities. The writers who wrote about breadlines, for whom evictions were "an every-day occurrence" and the furniture of the dispossessed "a common sight in the streets," and who described in novels, poems, and plays the economic and moral breakdown of middle-class families did not get their instructions from Moscow. As might be expected, they dramatized their private difficulties and expressed, often with more passion than felicity, their feelings of outrage at what they saw with their own eyes.

Other writers before them had made literary capital out of the sordidness and violence in American life. Stephen Crane's sketches of human misery, Frank Norris's unclinical studies in degeneration, Upton Sinclair's stomach-turning descriptions of the Chicago stockyards, and Jack London's catastrophic visions of revolution had already documented some of the unsmiling realities. This was the first time, however, an entire literary generation explored so relentlessly those areas hitherto ignored by the majority of their predecessors. After 1929 it was hardly necessary for the social writer to work up his subject matter in libraries; history collaborated with his designs, and every day's newspapers furnished him with a thousand themes.

For this, as Edward Newhouse explained in his novel *You Can't Sleep Here* (1934), was not the "lost generation," but the "crisis generation," disburdened of some of the moral problems that had obsessed their elders but just as troubled and guilty as the generation of Hemingway and Faulkner. It consisted of the young people who had to live with their parents because they "had never been absorbed into industry or the professions"; of recent college and high-school graduates who knew with painful certainty that the economy had no place for most of them.

Whether the writer chose for his subject the lives of the "Bottom Dogs," the adventures of young Irish delinquents, the "Neon Wilderness" of Chicago's North Side Poles, the Negro slum dwellers, the

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poor East Side Jews, Georgia "crackers," California fruit pickers, toilers on the Detroit assembly lines, Gastonia's textile workers, decaying Southern families, rebellious farmers, department-store wage slaves, or "boxcar" hoboes, it was the Depression itself, impersonal and ubiquitous, that gave meaning to their specific documentations. If much of the so-called "proletarian" writing violated almost every literary canon and if to many it positively reeked with the Depression, the best of it managed to objectify the social forces as they operated in the lives of real people.

In contrast to the dreary scenes of capitalism in decline, Russia during the early thirties seemed a hive of happy industry—not only to its well-wishers, but also to a large number of unideological observers. Confronted with what appeared to be a social and economic breakdown in their own country, a good many Americans were powerfully affected by the well-publicized achievements of the U.S.S.R., where history "was acting like a fellow-traveler." They contrasted the unemployment, the labor violence, the social disorders, the widespread despair in the United States with the energy and hopefulness of the Soviets. "The contrast," wrote Arthur Koestler, "between the downward trend of capitalism and the simultaneous steep rise of planned Soviet economy was so striking and obvious that it led to the equally obvious conclusion: They are the future—we, the past."

Joshua Kunitz found it impossible to communicate his deep feelings of joy and excitement in beholding busy bustling Moscow in the summer of 1930. To be sure, the hardships persisted, the food shortages, the dearth of consumers' goods, but at least there was no unemployment, and the people were heroic. Five years later, he could scarcely find words to describe the miraculous transformation that had occurred between his first and last visits:

The entire trip has been one continuous gasp of wonderment. The excellent shops, splendid window displays, asphalted streets, cars, trucks, buses, glittering new trams and trolley buses—noise, movement, snappy traffic cops, innumerable parks of culture and rest—young trees, flowers all along the main streets in all cities I visited—cars, ties, felt hats, European clothes, dance halls, cafes, new schools, new sanitoria and the universal spirit of song, joy and creative effort—these all one must see and experience really to believe.

The Moscow subway is not an isolated phenomenon: it is merely a superb symbol of the beautification of life that is proceeding at an inconceivable rate all over the USSR. The Soviet peoples are reaping the results of their superhuman labor and great initial sacrifices in industrializing and collectivizing the country. And this is just beginning.

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Other friendly visitors to the Soviet Union, as well as Kunitz himself, were by no means oblivious of the blights and blemishes in the Socialist Eden. Waldo Frank, for example, worried a little about "intellectual absolutism" in Russia, but he went on to say, "perhaps the want of flabby relativism which goes by the name of liberalism in the West and which is so often nothing but a want of conviction, is not an unmixed evil." So far as he was concerned, the West was culturally finished, and many "friends" of the U.S.S.R., enraptured by the poetry of Soviet statistics and depressed by the inability of the American Government to cope with the crisis at home, were ready to agree that the future might belong to the "greasy muzhiks" and their canny leaders.

In America the government turned its troops against the Washington bonus marchers. Had three thousand bourgeois marchers descended on the Kremlin, Malcolm Cowley wrote in 1933, "They would be efficiently suppressed (not executed; the day of mass executions has passed in Russia). What would happen if 3,000 proletarians marched on the Kremlin? They wouldn't do so, because the Soviets are their own government. But if they ever did march, the government would yield to them, or cease to be communist."

Just as the Russian worker entered enthusiastically into the mighty schemes of the new socialist commonwealth, so the Russian writers, the literary "shock troops," were also pictured as joyous participants in the task of socialist reconstruction. Unlike their unemployed and unhonored equivalents in America, they were valued by the state and closely tied to their vast readership. Faced with the bewildering changes in daily life, they found, according to Kunitz, the newspaper incomparably more fascinating than the fairy story. They discovered the poetry of fact, the magic of collective farms and tractor factories. It was not enough for them to reflect life; they had to mold it as well.

Amidst these "cultural crusaders in the service of the Revolution," American writers sometimes felt a little apologetic, a little humiliated to be introduced as mere students of literature. So Isidor Schneider felt when he "admitted shamefacedly" to a machinist in a Moscow park that he was a writer. As Americans, they could not share the intoxication that came with the knowledge that one was a part of a gigantic idealistic enterprise. Commenting on the literary life of Moscow in 1935, Matthew Josephson described it as "the *ville lumière* which was Paris," a center of activity, creation, and joy. The exiles who crowded the city joined with people instead of "festering idly" as foreigners.

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Although Josephson regretted the excessive attention to reportage, the unremitting revolutionary tempo which allowed no place for a "genial disinterested and prophetic vision," he felt the excitement of the great projects in which all the Russian writers were involved. He noted, too, how comfortably they lived.

To many American writers, then—the eminent and the obscure—Russia in the thirties was both a reproach to America and a hope of the world. Its totalitarian features were not ignored, its curtailing of civil and intellectual liberties were regretted, but its gains and its ultimate goals appeared to overbalance its failures. Were it not for its enemies, waiting for a chance to destroy it, the Russian leaders would not have had to devote the bulk of their country's resources to national defense or to limit personal freedom. Even so, according to Upton Sinclair, who sent his revolutionary greetings to the U.S.S.R. in 1937, the Russians had followed the advice of Emerson and hitched their wagon to a star. They had solved the problem of national minorities, raised a degraded peasantry "from superstition and drunkenness," introduced modern machinery, ended racial discrimination, and established a workers' government. Finally, and perhaps most important for a large number of American intellectuals after 1932, they had assumed the leadership in the world struggle against the menacing power of international fascism.

Before Hitler seized power in January 1933, the American Communist Party, following the lead of the Comintern, had made no effort to mobilize all antifascist opinion in the United States. Not until late March did the *Daily Worker* call for "A United Front to fight Fascism." Meanwhile, Joseph Freeman, on his own authority, wrote a manifesto against the Nazis in *The New Masses*, and on March 3 a number of writers and journalists were invited by the editors to send in their protests against German fascism.

The statements from Newton Arvin, Roger N. Baldwin, Heywood Broun, Lewis Corey (Fraina), Waldo Frank, Michael Gold, Horace Gregory, Granville Hicks, Sidney Hook, Horace M. Kallen, Scott Nearing, James Rorty, Isidor Schneider, and Edwin Seaver, while differing in emphasis, agreed on fundamental points: 1) Hitlerism was a brutish doctrine, "pitilessly hostile to every impulse of the intellectual or the creative life"; 2) the Nazis represented the last murderous impulse of a dying capitalism; 3) the victory of National Socialism in Germany would encourage and strengthen America's native fascists; 4) the Nazi threat compelled a "grim rallying together of all progres-

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sive groups throughout the world"; and 5) the American intellectuals had to politicize themselves and to take the lead in setting up "an anti-Fascist front of intellectual workers in America."

Until the Nazi-Soviet pact in 1939 hatred of world fascism brought writers and intellectuals into the Left orbit who otherwise might never have affiliated with the movement. The New Deal was at least beginning to grapple with the problems of the Depression; undoubtedly the Roosevelt administration won over a good many incipient radicals. Even those who were not prepared to junk capitalist democracy, however, unhesitatingly supported any antifascist organization no matter what group or party was sponsoring it. Their antifascism was subsequently judged in some quarters as "premature," but throughout the thirties, fascism and Nazism were hardly phantom movements. There is no need to ask why so many writers, prompted by the age-old vision of the just society, should have believed their joint resistance to Hitlerism was at once moral and practical.

The revulsion inspired by the Nazis in American liberals and radicals antedated the revelations of Belsen and Auschwitz; to them, Hitler was a forerunner of a "new and bloody 'dark ages.'" The reports, official and unofficial, flowing out of Germany after his triumph, the stories of pogroms and book burnings and concentration camps, enforced the image of the Third Reich as a medieval hell. It is impossible to understand why so many writers and artists flocked into the movement unless one can begin to sense the violent loathing, rage, and fear provoked by the Nazis. Any group, in or out of the United States, that condoned or aided fascism took on its gruesome aspect, whether it was the Ku Klux Klan, the Black Legion, or the Croix de Feu; any group persecuted by the Nazis, whether Communist or Socialist or Catholic or Jewish, met with approbation. The majority of writers during the thirties agreed with Mike Gold's assertion: "Every anti-fascist is needed in this united front. There must be no base factional quarrels."

The culmination of antifascist sentiment among the American writers came at the point when many of them had become skeptical of Stalin's grandfatherly mask and disturbed by some of the party tactics. The event that aroused them more powerfully than any other episode during the entire violent decade, and which distracted them from the Moscow trials his managers had already begun to stage, was the Spanish Civil War and the armed intervention of Germany and Italy.

The party benefited from this sentiment. Between 1936 and 1939 an overwhelming majority of the American intelligentsia—artists, teach-

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ers, writers, men and women of all the professions—regarded the Spanish war as “a testing ground for war with fascism in general.” The writers and artists who spoke for the Spanish Loyalists, who raised money for medical aid, or who literally crawled on their hands and knees to cross the border into Spain as volunteers were not consciously furthering party interests, nor was there anything ulterior or sinister in their devotion to the Spanish peasantry. The issues appeared clear-cut: the cause of Spain was the cause of democracy and morality. Sectarian bickerings seemed contemptible in the light of such awesome events, and for more than a few the nobility of the Spaniards engendered a comparable nobility in themselves.

The writers beguiled by “the colossal attraction” of Bolshevism’s “ultimate vision” did not consider their acceptance of Marxism as a departure from traditional progressive values. They conceived of it, rather, in Arthur Koestler’s words, “as the logical extension of the progressive humanistic trend . . . the continuation and fulfilment of the great Judeo-Christian tradition—a new fresh branch on the tree of Europe’s progress through Renaissance and Reformation, through the French Revolution and the Liberalism of the nineteenth century, toward the Socialist millennium.” If the rebel’s quarrel with society has neurotic roots, as Koestler profoundly believes, he observes nonetheless “that in the presence of revolting injustice the only honorable attitude is revolt.” The perversion of noble ideals that marks the end of most revolutions signifies both human fallibility and the melancholy truism “that a polluted society pollutes even its revolutionary offspring.”

The writers subsequently identified with the Communist Party, either as converts or as sympathizers, made up a most diverse group and one not easy to classify. A few were dedicated socialists, spiritually thirsting for community. For them the party was the beneficent agency through which the good society would be inaugurated and mankind released from its long bondage, and they felt strengthened as writers, less weak and vulnerable and useless when they gave themselves to the revolutionary cause. It was not a decision lightly taken; as Meridel Le Sueur described it:

It is difficult because you are stepping into a dark chaotic passionnal world of another class, the proletariat, which is still perhaps unconscious of itself, like a great body sleeping, stirring, strange and outside the calculated, expedient world of the bourgeoisie. It is a hard road to leave your own class and you cannot leave it by pieces or parts; it is a birth and you have to be born whole out of it. In a complete new body. None of the old ideology is any good in

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it. The creative artist will create no new forms of art or literature for the new hour out of that darkness unless he is willing to go all the way, with full belief, into that darkness.

For others, agreement with Communist interpretations and solutions involved no such trauma or rapture. Communism appealed to them because it seemed a science as well as an ethic, because it explained and foretold as well as inspired, and because it had become incarnate in a dynamic country directed by a hardheaded elite. Contemptuous of their own "politicians" and impatient with the government's failure to cope with the Depression at home or to recognize the menace of fascism abroad, American intellectuals uncritically accepted the Bolshevik self-portrait. Soviet propaganda pictured a society where unemployment and racial discrimination had been permanently abolished, where artists and writers were honored and made use of, a country resolutely opposed to imperialistic ventures and staunchly antifascist.

In America, tirades against the "Reds" by reactionaries and Right Wing crackpots, the frenetic anti-Communist editorials in the Hearst newspapers, seemed to confirm the party's cartoon image of its enemies and amounted almost to an endorsement. According to Isidor Schneider, the Communist Party had "ideas and a program, unlike the intellectually-dead 'regular' parties," which concealed their programs. "That is why," he wrote, "although numerically at any given moment the Communists may be vastly outnumbered by sporadic and amorphous movements like the Townsend Plan and Coughlin's League for Social Justice, Communists make the strongest and most enduring impression; why the hatred of the bourgeoisie is concentrated against them; why unorganized elements within the masses turn to 'red' organizations in spite of the bitter propaganda against them; and, finally, why there is so great curiosity about them."

No other party, he might have added, sponsored such an array of cultural and political organizations, bookshops, theatrical companies, dance groups, and films, or such well-publicized and carefully staged mass meetings. "The Communist calendar," Orrick Johns discovered after he had joined the party, was "as full of dates as *festas* in Italy, all of which must be prepared for and exploited in one way or another: the anniversary of Marx, of Lenin, of the Sacco-Vanzetti execution, of May Day, of the October Revolution and so on." The tens of thousands who attended mass meetings in the San Francisco Civic Auditorium to hear Dreiser speak on behalf of Tom Mooney never suspected the weeks of preparation that preceded it. Although jointly sponsored by

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trade-unionists, socialists, anarchists, and liberals, the "moves of the hostile colleagues were anticipated at 'fraction' meetings, and district meetings. The best way to work with this opposition was worked out, and speakers were planted to deal with the controversial points. As a result the Communists usually carried the argument."

The comments of neither Schneider nor Johns, however, begin to make clear why the party attracted the relatively small number of writers who became bona fide members in the 1930's. Nor does the published and unpublished testimony of converts really give the literary historian much to go on. Retrospective explanations may be illuminating but not completely trustworthy. With some writers the reading of a book initiated the impulse; Malraux's *Man's Fate*, Lenin's *The State and Revolution*, John Strachey's *The Coming Struggle for Power*, and Lincoln Steffens's *Autobiography* each demanded in its own way that the reader make a choice for or against humanity. Others were drawn into the movement by their friends, or because a solicitous editor of *The New Masses* had invited them to contribute to the magazine, or because they had visited the U.S.S.R., or because they wanted the chance to mingle with real proletarians.

It was also reassuring to feel that one belonged to an international movement whose ultimate triumph no temporary setbacks could avert, that one was working for mankind. At the same time the party might solve racial, sexual, social, or economic anxieties as well as satisfy spiritual yearnings. The dances in Webster Hall, the unit socials, benefits, picnics, and forums guaranteed that no good Bolshevik need be lonely.

Yet for the majority of writers who were associated in some way or another with the movement, it was the times, not the party, that made them radicals. The party attracted them because it alone seemed to have a correct diagnosis of America's social sickness and a remedy for it. The overwhelming majority never joined the party, but they put on "red shirts" as an emblem of revolt, as a way of showing their repudiation of the "stuffed shirts." Few were ready to make the sacrifices demanded by the party in the early thirties, but the issues that preoccupied the party during the first half of the thirties—the plight of the hungry and the evicted, the exploitation of the Negro, the miseries of the unemployed, the persecutions in Germany, the struggles of labor—became their preoccupations. For a short time American writers wrote novels, poems, plays, criticism, and reports that dealt rudely and sometimes powerfully with the most pressing issues of American life.

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If the thirties ended in disenchantment, and if passionate men with passionate convictions sometimes deceived others and more often were self-deceived, in no other decade did writers take their social roles more devotionally. As in all periods of great revivals, whether religious or political, the majority of the converts lapsed into their old ways, unable to maintain the enthusiasm that momentarily overcame them. Only a few held on to the vision after its earthly prophets had been discredited.

In their excavations of the radical past, historians have dug up little but fragments and ruins, and from one vantage point the story of the radical writers in the 1930's can be read as a terrible object lesson on the dangers of unreflective political commitment. Politics in itself, as Philip Rahv wrote in 1939, is neither good nor bad for the writer. "The real question is more specific: what is the artist actually doing in politics? What is he *doing with it* and what is it *doing to him*? How does his political faith affect him as a craftsman, what influence does it exercise on the moral qualities and on the sensibility of his work?"

The strongest writers of the thirties used politics and were not used by it, but the Left writer, in and out of the party, faced something more insidious than party pressure: his own compulsion to subordinate the problems of his craft and deeply felt intellectual concerns to political journalism. He willingly enrolled or inadvertently found himself in the corps of literary shock-troops. He attended conventions and wrote resounding manifestoes and signed petitions and protests. He became a spokesman or a partisan in the literary wars, and he accommodated himself too easily to the philistinism of the party.

This is not to say that writers ought to have remained politically autonomous, although some of them would have done better work if they had. The sin of the Left writer, if you can call it such, was to think politically and pragmatically instead of conveying his revolutionary vision in his own way. Party leaders regarded the writers primarily as press-agents, and the writers, eager to be of use, and possibly flattered by the serious attention accorded their work in the party press, squared their values with the party's and stifled their misgivings. They impoverished themselves not because they were disgusted with capitalism or because they damned social iniquity, but because they were unable to enter into the world of their adversaries and retain what F. Scott Fitzgerald called the "double vision," the "ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind, at the same time, and still retain the ability to function."

The literary "giants" glorified by the party after it decided officially

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to graft the twig of Marxian revolution on the Washington Elm and the Charter Oak—Whitman, Emerson, Thoreau, and Mark Twain among others—retained this “double vision.” Political and social issues touched them deeply, but they were seldom beguiled into making foolish public statements, and, what is more important, they did not stoop to attacking their fellow writers who disagreed with them. The writers who condoned Stalin’s “liquidations” or who conducted their own trials and heresy hunts were shortly to be tried and symbolically murdered by American inquisitors.

Yet surely a movement which involved so many intelligent and generous men and women cannot be barren of significance. Communism, it has been said, contributed nothing of permanent value to American literature; but even if the poems, plays, novels, criticism, and reportage composed under party sponsorship or written by writers whose social sympathies had been quickened by party agitation were worthless (which is simply not true), no writer who lived through the revolutionary interlude either as advocate or critic remained unaffected. If his agonizing over the working class, his debates over the nature of art and politics, his temptations, his doubts, despairs, ecstasies, meant little to Earl Browder or William Z. Foster (one influential trade union leader was worth more to them than five dozen writers), they were of immense importance to the writer himself. The strong impact of Communism’s program upon even those writers who opposed it must be reckoned with. So must the vitalizing influence of the left-wing intellectuals who stirred up controversies, discovered new novelists and playwrights, opened up hitherto neglected areas of American life, and broke down the barriers that had isolated many writers from the great issues of their times.

We who precariously survive in the sixties can regret their inadequacies and failures, their capacity for self-deception, their too frequent substitution of moral indignation for critical thinking, their shrillness, their self-righteousness. It is less easy to scorn their efforts, however blundering and ineffective, to change the world.

## *Harold Fleming*

### THIS SCENE

Already one less leaf is on the tree.  
But when I need a brush to paint this scene  
the way clean women keep their kitchens clean  
I end up on the wrong end of a switch.

You hold your child frightened in the night  
because I turn the paintbrush on myself  
and scrawl a face to make a child yell,  
but what is life if not to switch us twice?

You gesture with a sigh that signifies  
your eagerness to be more than a twig:  
tears must be part of any mother's grief.

So I will paint this scene, and with a sprig  
of green, a spray of spring to hold in place  
the flowers standing for appearance's sake.

*Louis Ruchames*

## The Pulitzer Prize Treatment of Charles Sumner

THE SUBVERSION of the character of a founding father of American civil equality should not be taken lightly—especially during the era of the Freedom Riders. When such subversion is honored by a Pulitzer award, there is great cause for concern.

At the end of the Civil War, Charles Sumner of Massachusetts was regarded by many as one of the nation's foremost statesmen, perhaps, as George F. Hoar described him, "the greatest American statesman since the Revolutionary time." Scholar, humanitarian, and senator from 1851 to his death in 1874, Sumner contributed magnificently to some of the most important social causes of his day: the abolition of slavery, prison reform, public education and international peace. His arguments in 1849 before the Supreme Court of the Commonwealth on behalf of integration in the public schools of Boston anticipated the reasoning of the Supreme Court of the United States in 1954. He helped to organize the anti-slavery Whigs and to found the Republican Party. He was the chief spokesman for the slave in the Senate during the years immediately preceding the Civil War. During the war he was the recognized leader of the Radical Republicans in the Senate; as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, no one played a more important role in preventing embroilment with England and France. After the war he was the principal architect of Congressional Reconstruction in the South. He was one of the early proponents of the eight-hour day. He was a key figure in the acquisition of Alaska and gave that territory its name. "No death," wrote Edward L. Pierce, his foremost biographer, "except that of Lincoln,—it was a common remark at the time,—had for a long period so touched the popular heart."

Despite these achievements, Sumner's reputation has grown dim. The passage of fifty years since his last biography provides a measure of his declining status in American history. Even when he is discussed his virtues are transformed into their opposites. The outspoken enemy of

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every form of injustice, the advocate of international peace, the devoted friend of the slave and the free Negro, has become in the writings of some modern historians an "eerie, evil genius . . . spinning tenuous spider-webs of far-fetched theory about Negro equality"—a "complete doctrinaire." Yet these judgments are unable to wipe out the contrary opinions of many outstanding men of his day—of Emerson, who said of him, "I never knew so white a soul"; or of Theodore Parker, who saw him as "the senator with a conscience." A contemporary historian of American law has called him "New England's greatest Senator."

The appearance of David Donald's *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War*,\* a study employing new sources of information which have been made public during the past half century, offers a fresh opportunity to reappraise the conflicting claims concerning Sumner's life and his role in American history. Donald brings to his task notable qualifications. He is a historian of note, and professor of history at Princeton University. His knowledge of Sumner's life is based upon years spent in diligent study of thousands of letters and other manuscripts in the Sumner collection at Harvard and elsewhere. Yet as one studies his work there comes to mind the caution sounded by another historian, Arthur Reed Hogue, who a decade ago edited Carl Schurz's unfinished biography of Sumner: "An objective view of Sumner was, and still is, difficult to obtain. The embers of those Civil War controversies still glow in the United States affecting, among others, the judgments of trained historians. The issues which men of Sumner's day argued can still, on occasion, become current issues, arousing century-old prejudices whenever they come into debate. Such prejudices are often, in fact, so deeply ingrained as to go unrecognized by those who possess them. The result is that when men like Sumner are introduced for discussion their real personalities are completely obscured in the smoke and dust raised by conflicting prejudices. . . . Charles Sumner . . . needs to be studied without prejudice. . . ."

Donald, unfortunately, is both prejudiced and apparently unaware of his prejudice. "Certainly I started my research without conscious preconceptions or partialities"—so he assures the reader in the preface to the present work. A glance at his biography of William Herndon, Lincoln's law partner, published in 1948, as he began his research into Sumner's life, reveals the opposite. There he characterizes Sumner as "the pompous Massachusetts senator with his ornate oratory and his affectation of grandeur," "the arrogant Massachusetts solon," and he

\* Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1960. \$6.75. This is the first volume of a projected two-volume biography.

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observes about the address for which the Southerner Brooks assaulted Sumner in the Senate that "In spite of its perfumed quotations from the classics, the speech reeked of the sewer."

Joined to this initial antipathy toward Sumner is an attitude toward slavery which fails to perceive its horrors and which renders it difficult for him to understand the deep hostility of Sumner and other anti-slavery leaders toward the "peculiar institution." Apparently Donald had some pangs of conscience in the matter, for in the book before us he feels impelled to assure the reader on this score. "In particular," he writes, "I hope that no one will accuse me of sympathizing with Negro slavery because I have not interjected a little moral discourse after each of Sumner's orations to the effect that he was on the side of the angels. Surely in the middle of the twentieth century there are some things that do not need to be said." If so, one wonders about those earlier comments in the Herndon biography in which he condemns Herndon's "intolerance" toward slavery: "But for the most part Herndon had the intolerance of a man whose knowledge comes entirely from books. He knew all about slavery. . . . But did he really know slavery? . . . It never occurred to him that slavery was something more than organized oppression, that the plantation was a way of life." Although Donald is not nearly so frank on this subject in his current biography, his judgments of the anti-slavery leaders and of various issues in which they were involved seem to stem from his inability to share their abhorrence of slavery as an indefensible evil.

A third significant characteristic of Donald's thinking is his concept of the ideal statesman. This concept, an inarticulate major premise of the present volume, is explicitly set forth in his collection of essays entitled *Lincoln Reconsidered*, published in 1956, where he notes that "Perhaps the secret of Lincoln's continuing vogue is his essential ambiguity. He can be cited on all sides of all questions. 'My policy,' he used to say, 'is to have no policy.'" This "fundamental opportunism," Donald asserts approvingly, "is characteristic of major American political leaders from Jefferson to Franklin D. Roosevelt. Our great Presidents have joyously played the political piano by ear, making up the melody as they went." The proper answer to the demand that historians teach "American values," he characteristically affirms, is to heed the "nonideological approach" of Abraham Lincoln, "whose one dogma was an absence of dogma." One may well take issue with Donald's characterization of Jefferson, Lincoln and Roosevelt as opportunists. But the crucial question is: How can a historian whose standards of statesmanship are the apotheosis of opportunism do justice to a statesman, the es-

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sence of whose life was a rejection of opportunism and a devotion to principle? To make plain that Donald does considerable injustice to Sumner and in many ways distorts the meaning of his life is the object of the following remarks.

\* \* \*

Donald entitles the first chapter of his book "A Natural Coldness," and attributes that quality to the young Sumner. In his zeal to demonstrate coldness, he does some curious things to the facts. One example will suffice. Referring to the death of Sumner's twin sister, Matilda, he observes that when she died Sumner "coolly recalled the anecdote of the Persian matron, who, told by her monarch that she could 'save from death *one* of her family and relatives,' chose to sacrifice husband and children in order to save her old and decrepit father, 'saying that another husband and other children she might have, *but another father never.*'" When read apart from their context in the letter in which they originally appeared and in conjunction with the paragraph which follows them in Donald's book, these words seem to show Sumner's heartless disregard for his twin sister. The meaning of the letter, however, is quite different. For it was written to Charlemagne Tower in reply to a letter of condolence on the death of Matilda, which had in turn revealed the death of Charlemagne's father. In trying to console his friend, Sumner wrote:

Permit me to join with you in grief. I offer you my sincere sympathies. The loss of a father I can only imagine: may God put far distant the day when that affliction shall come over me. . . .

You kindly mentioned my sister. I owe every one thanks and regard who speaks of her with respect. But my grief, whatever it may be, has not the source that yours has. A Persian matron, oppressed by a tyrant king, had the leave of the monarch to save from death *one* of her family and relatives. She had many children and a husband; but she had also a father, old and decrepit. Him she selected and saved, saying that another husband and other children she might have, *but another father never.* I have lost a sister; but I still have other sisters and brothers, entitled to my instructions and protection. I strive to forget my loss in an increased regard for the living. . . .

The reader may judge whether these words reflect a "natural coldness" in Sumner's character. A more representative description of Sumner's personality as a youth (not cited by Donald) is that of the Rev. Dr. Samuel M. Emery of Newburyport, Sumner's schoolmate, who wrote: "He was cordial to all, having a kind word for all, and ready for a joke with any one whom he chanced to meet. . . . He was

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more dignified than most young students, but genial at all times; and would perpetrate a joke with as much gusto as any others of his class."

Donald's attitude toward Sumner is clearly shown in his interpretation of Sumner's relationship toward a succession of older men who allegedly served as father substitutes, and whom he supposedly adored and slavishly imitated. These were Justice Joseph Story, the Reverend William Ellery Channing and John Quincy Adams. That Sumner had a warm relationship with each of these men is true, and that each loved him as a father would a son is no less true. But Donald perverts this relationship into a caricature when he portrays Sumner as capable only of aping each of these men, echoing their words whenever he spoke, and incapable of independent thought or action not patterned after something that one of them had said or done.

In describing Sumner's relationship to Judge Story, his teacher at the Harvard Law School, Donald offers several examples of such slavish imitation. Of Sumner's enthusiasm for Fanny Kemble, he declares that when "Story was charmed by Fanny Kemble, the young English actress who moved Boston to flurries of tears," Sumner "promptly dropped his law studies to attend the theater." One finds no indication here that perhaps the actress had an especial appeal for students generally and for Sumner in particular, that she had entranced many of Sumner's friends, and that Sumner always had a strong interest in the art of public declamation, for which she was justly renowned. That his enthusiasm was hardly a flunkey's response to Judge Story's opinion is obvious in a comment made in later years by Professor William C. Russell of Cornell University, a friend of Sumner's in the early thirties, who wrote that Sumner "was, as much as any of us, infatuated by her acting; and I remember his one day stopping me in the street, and drawing me out of the thoroughfare, and saying, 'Come, Russell, tell me something about Fanny Kemble,' with all the interest of a lover."

Disregarding Sumner's passionate fondness for literature since early childhood, Donald mistakenly ascribes this interest, too, to Judge Story's law school influence. Concerning Sumner's trip to Washington in 1834, he writes that "Sumner obediently made his first visit to Washington in 1834" at the suggestion of Judge Story and Professor Greenleaf of the Harvard Law School. If one recalls Sumner's lifetime hunger for travel, which began in his junior year in college, it is difficult to think of the trip to Washington as the result of a puppet's response. Pierce's explanation that "the love of travel was with Sumner an inherited passion," and that "he had for some time felt a strong desire to visit the national

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Capital . . . to see and hear the eminent statesmen of the time, and particularly to attend a session of the Supreme Court . . . to see Judge Story, whom he had known so well as professor," is a far more judicious explanation. Not only does Donald insist that Sumner aped Judge Story, he even manages to ascribe their disagreements to a similar cause: Sumner's inability to abandon certain of Story's earlier opinions which the latter no longer believed in. Even Sumner's trip to Europe, in December, 1837, over Judge Story's opposition, was taken, according to Donald, only because the latter had once suggested it. A more reasonable view of their disagreements is that Sumner, as an independent thinker, never permitted his esteem for any person to stand in the way of his own judgment. He accepted what he thought was true in Judge Story's opinions, but never hesitated to reject what he thought was untrue.

During the winter of 1837 Sumner sailed for Europe and remained there several years. Donald's animus toward Sumner is exposed by his comments upon Sumner's views of European life and thought. The Sumner who appears in this part of Donald's portrait is a two-faced character adapting his opinions to what he thinks his correspondent wants to hear, frequently condemning and praising the very same things to different friends. Concerning Sumner's assessment of European jurisprudence, Donald writes that he was "favorably predisposed toward continental jurisprudence" and "was impressed by what he saw. To his older friends at home, to be sure, he reported his opinions on the French law with circumspection." While condemning French law and lawyers to Judge Story, who had a poor view of the French legal system, to his lawyer friend, George Hillard, "Sumner wrote his true opinion that the French Code, so grossly calumniated in America, offered 'much greatly to admire.'" The fact is that this alleged differentiation between older and younger friends, and between Story and Hillard, is nowhere apparent in Sumner's letters. The comments to Hillard which Donald quotes are made in a letter of April, 1838. In this same letter, while praising the French Code, Sumner speaks harshly of Dupin, a leading French lawyer. True it is that at the end of March he had written to Story that a French court is "a laughable place," yet at the end of April, in still another letter to Story, he concludes: "I have attended court every day, and am delighted with the operation of the French penal code. There are many particulars in which they have immeasurably the start of us. . . ."

In view of Donald's tendency to misinterpret Sumner's views by failing to read his letters carefully, another example may be cited

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in passing. At one point he writes that, when in England, Sumner "thought poorly of Lord John Russell, who reminded him of a pettifogging attorney, since he wriggled as he spoke, 'played with his hat, [and] seemed unable to dispose of his hands or his feet.'" The opinion in question occurs in a letter written to Story in June, 1838. When read in context quite the opposite emerges: "Lord John Russell rose in my mind the more I listened to him. In person diminutive and rickety, he reminded me of a pettifogging attorney who lives near Lechmere Point. He wriggled round, played with his hat, seemed unable to dispose of his hands or his feet; his voice was small and thin, but notwithstanding all this, a house of upwards of five hundred members was hushed to catch his slightest accents. You listened, and you felt that you heard a man of mind, of thought, and of moral elevation."

Donald's almost willful lack of insight into Sumner's character is revealed in his attempt to explain Sumner's popularity during his European trip. The reasons given are various: "He had come to England at a most opportune time." ". . . the English were in a receptive mood . . . Sumner's letters of introduction initially opened doors for him . . . his own social resources. . . ." The last of these, according to Donald, consisted of Sumner's English descent, his "handsome and personable" appearance, the fact that "everything was delightfully new to him," his "naïvete," which delighted everyone, his quickness in adopting English social conventions, his enthusiasm in doing whatever his English hosts planned for him, his reserve, his discreetness, his interest in promoting the books of his American friends, and an almost unreflecting anti-American Anglophilism. Can these reasons account for the lifelong affection which Sumner evoked among the leading statesmen and writers of England? A more plausible explanation of his popularity was given by an Englishwoman, the wife of John Stuart Wortley: "I never knew an American who had the degree of social success he had; owing, I think, to the real elevation and truth of his character, his genuine nobleness of thought and aspiration, his kindness of heart, his absence of dogmatism and oratorical display, his general amiability, his cultivation of mind, and his appreciation of England without any thing approaching to flattery of ourselves or depreciation of his own country."

The months and early years following his return from Europe were unhappy ones for Sumner. Donald attributes this unhappiness in part to Sumner's financial worries and to his "comparative failure at the bar." But most important of all, he suggests, was the fact that "for the first time in his life he was obliged to stand alone, without the guidance and support from some older man who could give direction to his

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career." Now it is Samuel Gridley Howe who becomes the father figure. Although Sumner and Howe, the prominent humanitarian, became the most intimate of friends during these years, Donald explains that "Howe could not quite fill the place that Sumner's father and later Judge Story had played in his life." Moreover, Howe's marriage and departure for Europe in April, 1843 left Sumner "without that paternal counsel he needed to direct his life."

Amateur psychoanalysis is a dangerous pastime. In this instance, Donald's assumption that the key to an understanding of Sumner's early life is his almost desperate need of a father leads him to an unfortunate juggling of the facts. Thus he writes that "Sumner tried to imitate his friend in his career of bettering society." While it is true that as a result of this friendship Sumner grew interested in Howe's work with the blind and deaf, Donald is in error when he asserts that "Howe called Sumner's attention to the important work Horace Mann was doing to rejuvenate the public schools of the Commonwealth...." Sumner first met Howe in June, 1837, and their friendship blossomed only after Sumner's return from Europe in 1840. However, Sumner and Mann occupied law offices in the same building as early as 1834. They saw one another frequently, and Sumner undoubtedly knew of Mann's work before he met Howe. As early as June, 1836, Sumner commended Mann in writing as "the President of the Senate of Massachusetts, and a distinguished member of our profession." During the fall of 1837, Mann wrote in his journal: "Dined with C. Sumner to-day, who is going to Europe soon. When he goes, there will be one more good fellow on that side, and one less on this." In Europe, after visiting Victor Cousin at the Sorbonne in March, 1838, Sumner wrote in his Journal: "I described to him Mann's labors and character; he seemed grateful to hear of them, and asked particularly about Mr. Mann."

After insisting that Sumner sought to lean upon Howe as a father substitute, Donald concludes that "Howe resolutely refused to be an older man directing a young friend's career. On the contrary, he insisted that it was he who derived inspiration from Sumner. 'It has never been my lot to know a man more perfectly loyal to truth, right and humanity,' he assured his friend. 'You are my junior by many years, but to you I owe many of the feeble aspirations which I feel for progress upwards and onwards in my spiritual nature.'" The truth is that Howe never refused to direct Sumner's career, since he was never asked to do so. When he insisted that it was he who derived inspiration from Sumner, he was not pretending, as Mr. Donald seems to imply, but

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simply stating a fact. A look at the letter from which the above quotation is taken—it was written by Howe on November 7, 1846—indicates the extent of Howe's dependence upon Sumner. The truth is that they were deeply devoted friends whose influence upon one another, despite Howe's greater age, was mutual.

When Donald discusses the relationship between Sumner and William Ellery Channing, the Unitarian minister with whom Sumner formed a close friendship after his return from Europe, he again falls into a pit of his own digging. Applying his dogma of Sumner's extreme imitativeness, he writes: "Where Channing led, Sumner followed. He adopted all of the minister's arguments; he shared his concern over prison reform, education, international peace, and Negro slavery." But Sumner's concern with the above issues and many of his arguments were formed before he had the opportunity to be influenced by Channing's personality. Indeed, Donald's extremism in describing Sumner's so-called aping of Channing is revealed when he insists that from Channing Sumner "borrowed unquestioningly the postulates that 'states and nations . . . were amenable to the same moral law as individuals' and, therefore, that '*what is wrong for an individual is wrong for a state.*'" One would expect that such a judgment as "he borrowed unquestioningly" would be bolstered by documentation. Yet the footnote to this remark simply refers to a speech by Sumner, a scrutiny of which reveals that the words attributed to him are simply his approval of Channing's belief. From nothing in the speech could anyone conclude that Sumner had received the idea *unquestioningly* from Channing.

Nor does Donald offer any substantiation, other than the fact that their views coincided, for such statements as, "From Channing . . . Sumner derived his view of the proper role of the reformer," or "[Sumner was] convinced by Channing" that "‘man, as an individual, is capable of indefinite improvement, so long as he lives.’" Indeed, the latter remark is a quotation from Sumner's address of 1848 on "The Law of Human Progress." It is significant that nowhere in this address does Sumner mention Channing, although he quotes others who contributed to the idea of progress—Pascal and Turgot, for instance.

In 1845, Sumner, delivering Boston's annual Fourth of July oration, entitled "The True Grandeur of Nations," discussed the theme of international peace, and created a national and international sensation by his denunciation of war and preparations for war. In his obsession with Sumner's "extremism," Donald refers to this address as "the earliest public demonstration of Sumner's propensity for what might be called

illogical logicality, his tendency to extend a principle to its utmost limits. Given the assumption that war is bad, Sumner thought it followed that all wars are equally bad." Again the biographer fails to give a balanced analysis of Sumner's position. He omits, for instance, Sumner's basic argument, which takes its point of departure from the nature of modern war: "Whatever may have been its character in periods of barbarism, or when invoked to repel an incursion of robbers or pirates—the enemies of the human race—War becomes in our day, *among all the nations who are parties to the existing International Law*, simply a mode of litigation, or of deciding a *Lis Pendens*, between these nations. It is a mere **TRIAL OF RIGHT**. It is an appeal for justice to Force." As Sumner further notes, his argument "excludes the question, so often agitated, of the right of revolution, and that other question, on which the friends of Peace sometimes differ, the right of personal self-defence. It does not in any way involve the question of the right to employ force in the administration of justice, or in the conservation of domestic quiet." Had Donald remembered this point, he would not have stated that "When war came in 1861, America's foremost peace advocate solidly supported the military measures of the Union government," as though Sumner had abandoned his earlier peace principles in supporting the war measures of the North. At no time would the suppression of a slaveholders' rebellion against a legally and democratically constituted government have been, in Sumner's opinion, other than "the right to employ force in the administration of justice, or in the conservation of domestic quiet."

Although much more might be said about Donald's evaluation of Sumner's arguments against war, there is space here for only one additional comment—upon Sumner's address of 1849, "The War System of the Commonwealth of Nations." Referring to this address, Donald grudgingly admits that "If Sumner made any contribution to the ideas of the peace movement, it was his theory that war should be outlawed through international law." But he then qualifies this admission with the remark that "The difficulties involved in changing international law or in yielding national sovereignty to some international organization never occurred to Sumner. He was concerned with principles not with mechanics." The error here is twofold. Several times during this address Sumner alludes to the difficulties involved in changing international law and in persuading nations to yield their sovereignties. Moreover, he emphasizes the idea that the study of history reveals great obstacles to his plan: "In our aspirations let us not be blind to the

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lessons of history, or to the actual condition of men, so long accustomed to brute force, that, to their imperfect natures, it seems the only means by which injustice can be crushed." Sumner, indeed, cites the complexity of the task as an argument for setting forth the practical steps required for achieving world peace: "...unhappily we cannot—in the present state of human error—expect large numbers to appreciate its [war's] true character, and to hate it with that perfect hatred, which shall cause them to renounce its agency, unless we can offer an approved and practical mode of determining the controversies of nations, as a *substitute* for the imagined necessity of an appeal to the sword. This we are able to do...." He then devotes a substantial part of the address to the presentation of such proposals as a Congress of Nations, a High Court of Judicature, and the establishment of arbitration through formal treaties between nations as a way of eliminating conflict and, in the process, creating a new system of international law.

Following "The True Grandeur of Nations" address and his growing dedication to the causes of peace, prison reform and anti-slavery, Sumner came to be ostracized by Boston's conservative leaders of public opinion and by many others of its higher social and economic strata with whom he had previously been intimate. Donald places the blame for this estrangement on Sumner's personality, suggesting that it was due primarily to his alleged inability to accept criticism and hardly at all to ideological differences: "He started by holding ideas most New Englanders shared.... Once he appeared before the public, he was attacked, and the more he was criticized, the more inflexible his opinions became. Carrying his ideas to extremes, he alienated moderate opinion and placed himself, as George Ticknor announced, 'outside the pale of society.'" But Donald does not explain why, if Sumner shared the ideas of most New Englanders, these ideas were initially criticized when Sumner expressed them publicly. Actually, most leaders of society and opinion in Boston did not share Sumner's views on slavery and other issues when he first expressed them in the 1840's. Leonard W. Levy, in his perceptive study, *The Law of the Commonwealth and Chief Justice Shaw*, suggests, using Charles Francis Adams as his source, "that while a shallow veneer of anti-slavery sentiment had been fashionable among them," this veneer was "without roots either in conviction or in material interests,"—as Adams put it, "mere sentiment." Levy concludes that by mid-century "a great majority of Boston's 'best people' no longer concealed their warmth toward Southern interests."

The difference between Sumner and most of the leaders of New

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England society was that the latter generally expressed privately any aversion they had to slavery; their public expression was cautiously phrased so as not to offend the slaveholder. On specific issues, as for instance the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, they were willing to compromise with slavery even where compromise meant increasing its strength. Sumner's opposition, however, was always forthright, on specific as well as on theoretical issues, since his basic aim was to weaken and overthrow the institution. His course could do no other than arouse the enmity of those Bostonians who really wished to maintain the status quo.

Donald's bias is disclosed when he views the conflict between Sumner and the elite of Boston society from the point of view of George Ticknor, the literary historian, an arch-conservative in his political and economic views. Donald suggests, in Ticknor's phrase, that Sumner "placed himself" outside of high society. The implication is that Sumner's exclusion was due to his "extremism" and alleged rigidity rather than to the intolerance of a stratum of society which could brook no opposition to its views. A more likely explanation is suggested by Pierce when he notes that Ticknor, who was an important arbiter of opinion in Boston, "was firm in his conviction against antislavery agitation." "In a society where public opinion governs," Ticknor wrote to Hillard, "unsound opinions must be rebuked; and you can no more do that while you treat their apostles with favor, than you can discourage bad books at the moment you are buying and circulating them." Through failure to discern the ideological source of the conflict between Sumner and Boston's conservatives, or to recognize the aggressive ostracism practiced by many of the latter toward non-conformists, Donald is led to explain the conflict as the result of Sumner's irascibility and rigidity. These he attributes to the "personal disasters and professional failures during the early 1940's" which

had turned Sumner against the Boston society he once so admired. His inner state of mind was reflected in the rhetoric of his orations, in the frequent images of destruction and mutilation which recurred in his speeches. His references to "nations, now prostrate on the earth with bloody streams running from their sides," to "Blood! blood! . . . on the hands of the representative from Boston," to the "blood which spurts from the lacerated, quivering flesh of the slave," are ample, if unintentional, evidence of the deep anger that drove him on.

The intimation of these remarks, that Sumner's strong response to slavery and the war against Mexico was abnormal, to be adequately accounted for by his personal bitterness, is perhaps an index of Donald's

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insensitivity to the evils of slavery and the unjustness of the Mexican War. For in that speech Sumner was referring to the fact that Robert C. Winthrop, Congressman from Boston, had voted for arms to carry on the war against Mexico. One wonders what was spilt during that war, if not blood? As to blood flowing from the "quivering flesh of the slave," Donald may be referred to the autobiographies of Frederick Douglass and other escaped slaves for evidence as to whether this was hyperbole or fact.

By attributing Sumner's conflict with Boston's conservatives to personal frustrations culminating in hatred and anger, rather than to ideological differences, Donald is unable to explain why Sumner's broken friendships were with those who condemned the anti-slavery agitation or wished to compromise the issue for reasons of economic or political expediency, while his unbroken and deepening friendships for the most part were with those who did not. Nor does he deal with the fact that Sumner sought to maintain friendship with many who disagreed with his views, as, for instance, with Edward Everett, Judge William Kent, Louis Agassiz and William Prescott. How incorrect he is in his interpretation of this matter is revealed in a passage from the biography of Richard Henry Dana, Jr., by Charles Francis Adams, who writes that at the time

feeling also ran high; and in Boston it ran all one way.... An abolitionist was looked upon as a sort of common enemy of mankind; a Free Soiler was only a weak and illogical abolitionist.... The few representatives of the unfashionable side—and in number they were a mere handful—who had a recognized standing in the drawing-rooms of Summer, Park and Beacon streets were made to feel in many ways the contempt there felt for the cause they espoused. Sumner and Dana, for instance, had long been frequent and favored guests in the house of Mr. Ticknor. After they became pronounced Free-Soilers they soon ceased to be seen there; and, indeed, things went so far that all social relations between them and the family of their former host were broken off. So it was generally.

Sumner became a close friend of John Quincy Adams during the years immediately preceding the ex-President's death in 1848. Donald remarks that Adams "had apparently hardly known Sumner before he delivered 'The True Grandeur of Nations'" in July, 1845. Yet almost two years earlier, in September, 1843, Sumner had written to Lord Morpeth in England: "I have seen old Mr. Adams lately several times. He is very well; and indeed he is strong and more intense than ever in his hatred of slavery. I enclose a recent letter from him on the

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subject." In discussing Adams's praise of Sumner's "The True Grandeur of Nations," Donald remarks:

Always responsive to praise, Sumner became Adams's adoring admirer. He had always extolled the ex-President's "unquestioned purity of character, and remarkable attainments, the result of constant industry," but in earlier years, when under the influence of Beacon Hill, he had objected "most strenuously to his manner, and to some of his expressions and topics, as unparliamentary and subversive of the rules and order of debate." Now he rejoiced in the very violence and vituperation with which Adams conducted his congressional campaign against slavery. Whenever the old President was in Quincy, Sumner came out to sit at his feet, and he undiscriminatingly adopted all of Adams's opinions, from his enthusiastic nationalism to his injunction that a statesman should "*Never accept a present.*"

These comments exaggerate both Sumner's early criticism of Adams and his alleged discipleship in later years. The criticism cited above, contained in a letter to Francis Lieber in February, 1842, was not particularly due to the influence of Beacon Hill but to Sumner's belief that the rules of debate in Congress, which he felt that Adams had violated, were "among the great safeguards of liberty, and particularly of freedom of speech." And in the same letter it is more than Adams's "purity of character, and remarkable attainments" that are praised: "His cause was grand. If I had been in the House, I should have been proud to fight under his banners. He has rallied the North against the South; has taught them their rights, and opened their eyes to the 'bullying' (I dislike the word as much as the thing) of the South." In December, 1842 Sumner wrote to Longfellow: "Send, if you have not already, a copy of your 'Slavery Poems' to John Quincy Adams. He deserves the compliment for his earnest advocacy of freedom, and the rights of the North. God bless every champion of the truth! And may man bless the champion also." These are hardly the sentiments of someone writing under the antagonistic influence of Beacon Hill.

Nor did Sumner adopt "undiscriminatingly" in later years "all of Adams's opinions." In 1846, for instance, when, according to Donald, Sumner had already become Adams's intellectual sycophant, Sumner disagreed strongly with Adams's nationalist position in the Oregon dispute. In a letter to Lord Morpeth in March he commented that "Among the persons who have lost character in the Oregon discussions is J. Q. Adams. His course has been eccentric, claiming the whole  $54^{\circ} 40'$  . . . and I have been not a little pained to be obliged to withdraw my sympathies from the revered champion of freedom. . . ." In passing,

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it may be noted that Donald tars Adams with the same brush he uses upon Sumner, when he attributes Adams's praise of Sumner's "The True Grandeur of Nations" and later addresses to Adams's "sheer love of combat," a "suspicious hostility toward State Street," and "bad temper and stubborn disposition." Not a word about Adams's feeling for the suffering of the slave, or for the democracy endangered by the slaveholders and their Northern sympathizers.

Donald offers a detailed study of the efforts of Sumner and other anti-slavery members of the Whig party, known as Conscience Whigs, to form an anti-slavery party for the 1848 Presidential election. After the Democrats had nominated pro-slavery Lewis Cass and the Whigs slaveholder Zachary Taylor, the Conscience Whigs, through Sumner and Charles Francis Adams, issued a call for a convention at Worcester, to which all opposed to both Taylor and Cass were invited. In describing Sumner's hopes for the convention, Donald quotes as his own the opinion of George Hillard, who because of his conservative political views, devotion to the Whig party, and attachment to George Ticknor, had grown somewhat estranged from Sumner: "Sumner, as Hillard cynically observed, expected the union of antislavery factions to produce 'a new political Jerusalem. . . .'" About Sumner's suggestion at the convention that it was time to abandon both old parties and form a new one based upon sincere anti-slavery convictions, Donald comments: "It was well for Sumner that he had the power of self-deception, for the great crusading army he thought he was organizing was, even in Massachusetts, a mongrel assortment of disgruntled Conscience Whigs, a few Webster followers, furious that their chief had been spurned at Philadelphia, assorted Liberty men, and other disaffected. . . . None of these discord and inconsistencies troubled Sumner; he was marching to Zion."

It may be noted, first, that no one, according to Donald, seems to have been present at the convention out of concern for the slave or for democracy. All were there for personal reasons: they were "disgruntled," "patronage-hungry," and "disaffected." Nor is it true, as Donald suggests, that Sumner expected the convention to march quick-step to Zion. He realized the difficulties which the new movement faced. In his speech at the convention he discussed the likelihood that the new party would fail to elect its candidates. He emphasized that the party was being organized not for immediate but for ultimate political victory. "But it is said," he remarked,

that we shall throw away our votes, and that our opposition will fail. Fail, sir! No honest, earnest effort in a good cause can fail. It may not be crowned

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with the applause of men; it may not seem to touch the goal of immediate worldly success, which is the end and aim of so much in life. But it is not lost; it helps to strengthen the weak with new virtue, to arm the irresolute with proper energy, to animate all with devotion to duty, which in the end conquers all. . . . Our example will be the mainspring of triumph hereafter.

When one remembers that out of this convention there ultimately emerged the victorious Republican Party, the reader may decide as to whose judgment is superior: the biographer's or his subject's.

Donald, at one point, assesses the impact of Sumner's increasing anti-slavery activities during the 1840's upon his early friendship with Charles Felton and George Hillard. Describing their increasing estrangement, he chides Sumner, who, he says, became "increasingly rabid" on anti-slavery and peace. The characterization of Sumner as "rabid" indicates the biographer's prejudice; one need only say that Sumner was no more rabid in his opposition to slavery than were Boston's leaders of public opinion in their insistence upon compromise with slavery. Indeed, Sumner's views on slavery did not change perceptibly after 1845. His basic political goal was to prevent slavery from spreading to the Territories, and to prohibit it wherever the national government held political power, as in Washington, D. C. Hillard, on the other hand, came increasingly under Ticknor's influence. In 1850 he supported the Fugitive Slave Law and in 1860 the Bell-Everett ticket. It was not that Sumner became increasingly fanatical but that the two friends grew to have less and less in common as their political paths diverged. Yet even here Donald exaggerates the break between the two when he says that Hillard kept up only a "thin, formal relationship" with Sumner. Indeed, since he makes Sumner out to be something of a monster—"In the spring of 1847, when Hillard was seriously ill and confined to his house for eight days, Sumner did not take time to visit him"—it may be noted, as Donald fails to do, that just before Hillard sailed for Europe in 1847 he confided to Sumner his will and other papers while Sumner in turn gave Hillard letters of introduction to English friends. In later years they continued to exchange letters, and their last meeting in 1873 reveals their deep affection for one another despite their differences.

In describing Sumner's political activities after the election of 1848, Donald attributes to him a demagoguery in his desire to court the favor of the Democrats, which, he implies, was motivated by political ambition. "Shortly after the election of 1848," he writes, "Sumner began making statements he once would have condemned as Jacksonian demagoguery. . . . He grew enthusiastic about the European revolutions of 1848 . . . and hoped that they would destroy the outrageous social

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and economic injustices that had, to tell the truth, seemed anything but outrageous to him only a few years earlier when he visited England." But the contrary is true. That Sumner had been outraged by the injustices which he had seen ten years earlier in Europe is plain in a letter written to Judge Story in 1838, wherein he describes "the state of things which I find here, where wealth flaunts by the side of the most squalid poverty, where your eyes are constantly annoyed by the most disgusting want and wretchedness...." It is similarly expressed after his return from Europe in 1842 in a letter written to his brother, George, then in London. "Those who know my opinions," Sumner wrote, "know that I saw and felt the plague-spots of England as much as anybody. The government is an oligarchy,—the greatest and most powerful in the history of the world. There is luxury the most surprising side by side with poverty the most appalling. I never saw this in England, I never think of it now, without a shock."

\* \* \*

Sumner was elected to the Senate in 1851. During his early months in office he hesitated to take the floor against slavery, although speaking on other issues, to prove to his colleagues and others that his interests extended beyond anti-slavery. As his silence continued it elicited a growing criticism from his anti-slavery constituents in Massachusetts. Finally, Sumner did secure the floor and in August, 1852, delivered a powerful anti-slavery address entitled "Freedom National, Slavery Sectional," which pleased his critics and evoked great praise from anti-slavery circles. The criticism was resumed during the next session when he again seemed unable to attack slavery. During this period, Donald holds, "Sumner became petulant under these strictures." Strangely enough, the one remark by Sumner which is cited as evidence indicates that Sumner bore the criticism with stoicism rather than petulance. "If among my discouragements," Donald quotes him as writing, "shall be alienation or distrust at home, I will try to bear this, and keep on in my duty." Indeed, because his devotion to the anti-slavery movement transcended personal considerations, Sumner exercised unusual forbearance toward his most violent critics. To Theodore Parker he wrote on March 28, 1853: "If Phillips, whom I love as an early comrade and faithful man, or Pillsbury, rail at me for my small work in anti-slavery, I will not reply. To me the cause is so dear that I am unwilling to set myself against any of its champions. I would not add to their burdens by any word of mine." Several other letters written during this period indicate a similar attitude.

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Donald's attempt to depict Sumner as testy is intended to prove that a conflict with the political scientist Lieber, which took place at this time, was provoked by Sumner's so-called viciousness. The cause of the conflict is described as follows: "Sore and sensitive, Sumner did not re-examine his own course to see whether he might possibly have been at fault. . . . Nor did he reply directly to his critics. Characteristically, he vented his anger upon a bystander, much as a child in a temper tantrum will beat the wall or the floor." "The bystander" was Francis Lieber, a South Carolina professor originally from Germany, whom Sumner had met in Washington in 1834, and with whom, from then on, he carried on an intensive correspondence. How, according to Donald, did Sumner vent his anger? Apparently Lieber had protested to Sumner in 1853 against the latter's practice of sending him anti-slavery material which told of the ill-treatment of Southern slaves by their masters. Sumner replied, says Donald, "that Lieber had no right to complain, as he had become 'the apologist of slavery.'" Lieber retorted with a denial that he was such an apologist and Sumner in turn "replied curtly that he was 'right glad' if indeed Lieber was not a slavery apologist." Lieber, continues Donald, "refused to answer so offensive a communication and broke off the correspondence and the friendship."

There are several points to be made about Donald's narration. First, it seems an exaggeration to refer to Sumner's two replies to Lieber as the venting of "wrath." Nor was there anything of the "innocent" bystander in Lieber's relationship to Sumner. They had been drifting apart for years as a result of their antithetical positions on the subject of slavery, and their final exchange of letters was simply the climax of an ideological conflict of several years' standing. Indeed, Sumner had shown great forbearance in not breaking off the friendship long before 1853, for as Donald admits, when Sumner was elected to the Senate Lieber wrote to Hillard that the victory was "bad for Sumner, for Boston . . . for Congress, for the Union, for the country." He also wrote to Sumner, "I do not rejoice at your election"—hardly the comment of a friend. Moreover, when Sumner, in private correspondence, accused Lieber of being "the apologist of slavery," he was not calumniating an innocent man but simply speaking the truth. Lieber was a slaveholder, and in the letter to Hillard in which he regretted Sumner's election he also wrote, "I detest this whole business and really think that if people must have slaves it is their affair to keep them." When the Liebers visited the Longfellows in 1849, Sumner was present and a very vigor-

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ous discussion ensued in which Lieber defended the physical treatment of the Southern Negro. Lieber also condemned any public agitation for the abolition of slavery. If these facts do not constitute an apology for slavery, it is difficult to conceive what would.

Sumner's election in 1851 had come about through a coalition of anti-slavery Democrats and Conscience Whigs who had formed the Free Soil Party. In the election of November, 1853 the coalition that had elected Sumner to office was defeated. The most important issue of this election was the adoption of a revised state constitution, formulated at a convention which had assembled in May of that year. The demand for a new constitution was initiated by the anti-slavery coalition that had elected Sumner; if passed, the new constitution would have weakened the political domination of the Boston conservatives. Among those who opposed it were Charles Francis Adams and Robert Gorham Palfrey, who had been Conscience Whigs and supporters of the coalition. Their attacks helped to defeat the constitution and resulted in a rift with the Free-Soil Party leaders which continued for years. Donald, in discussing this election, remarks that "The recent campaign caused many of the old Conscience Whig group to doubt, as did Adams and Palfrey, Sumner's political morality and to suspect that he lacked 'the main requisite, sagacity and penetration.'"

It is indicative of Donald's one-sidedness that he does not mention existing evidence that Sumner emerged not with diminished but with augmented popularity. While some Conscience Whigs did leave the Free Soil Party in the wake of Palfrey's and Adams's defection, it is also true that a public reference to Sumner by Adams, which Sumner felt to be derogatory, harmed Adams more than it did Sumner. Referring to certain mutual friends, Adams wrote to Sumner: "They think you unjustly attacked, and they pour out all their indignation against me for it. . . . But the feeling thus engendered may stand you in stead in the career you have before you." Senator Salmon Chase of Ohio thought that Sumner had emerged with greater prestige. "I mourn our loss in Massachusetts," he wrote, "but you individually acquitted yourself most nobly. That is a great consolation to your friends." Mr. Robert Carter, a journalist and scholar then living in Cambridge, wrote to Sumner: "Your popularity was never greater here than now. Everybody applauds your efforts in the late campaign; and the men who were most angry with you in 1852, are foremost in praising your course and your speech on the Constitution."

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The remainder of this biography abounds in other errors of fact and interpretation. In discussing the events preceding the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, Donald states that following the introduction of the bill by Stephen Douglas, Sumner proposed an amendment reaffirming the Missouri Compromise ban on slavery in the Nebraska territory. He suggests that the amendment "may have inadvertently been a disservice to freedom, as it also alerted Southern senators to the ambiguities of Douglas's proposal." To understand Sumner's purpose, it is necessary to know that immediately following the introduction of the bill by Douglas, and prior to Sumner's amendment, Senator Dixon of Kentucky, a Whig, offered an amendment which explicitly annulled the Missouri Compromise prohibition of slavery in the Territory and legalized slavery there. The amendment was offered because Douglas's bill was believed by Dixon to be ambiguous, and it was to counter Dixon's amendment, as well as the implied pro-slavery provisions of the original bill, that Sumner offered his amendment which affirmed the prohibition against slavery. Nor is Donald fair when he cites only Sumner and Chase as being opposed to the immediate consideration of Douglas's bill. There were others who thought Douglas's haste in requesting almost immediate debate upon his bill unseemly and unjustified. These included Senator Norris of New Hampshire, who was the first to ask for delay with the explanation that "Senators have not yet had time to examine the substitute which he reported from the committee yesterday." Senators Jones of Tennessee and Cass of Michigan, who were hardly political associates of Sumner and Chase, also called for postponement, the latter remarking that "just comity requires" an avoidance of "precipitancy."

Donald's treatment of the discussion of Kansas affairs in the Senate, which began in March, 1856, is replete with so many half-truths that it would take a book to refute them all. The key to his presentation is a refusal to attribute any guilt to the South for the outrages, murders and invasions which were committed in the Territory by ruffians and politicians from Missouri and other Southern states. "Disorder there was," he writes, "and some bloodshed, but up to 1856 there had been scarcely more of either than was normal on any frontier." He arrives at this conclusion by omitting to mention the invasion of Kansas in 1854 by about 1700 Missourians who voted for a delegate to Congress; another invasion in March, 1855 by 5000 armed Missourians who voted for a pro-slavery legislature and terrorized anti-slavery legislators and voters; and a third in November, 1855 by more than 1200 Mis-

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sourians. The result was a pro-slavery legislature that voted a code of laws which Oswald Garrison Villard has called "one of the foremost monuments of legislative tyranny and malevolence in the history of this country," and which a pro-slavery leader in Kansas praised as being "more efficient to protect slave property than [the code] of any state in the Union." Only pro-slavery men could hold office or serve as jurors; it was a felony punishable by at least two years' imprisonment to deny the legality of slavery in Kansas, and death was the penalty for creating dissatisfaction among slaves. To say that all this was no more than normal on any frontier is a travesty of the truth.

Donald, in closing his eyes to the repeated pro-slavery invasions of Kansas, is unable, apparently, to believe that the Republicans were serious in charging that the pro-slavery legislature had been elected by fraudulent means, for he remarks that the difference on the Kansas issue between the Democrats and the Republicans was in their respective attitudes toward popular sovereignty. The Democrats, he asserts, favored popular sovereignty while the Republicans opposed it. Yet the basic charge of the Republicans was that popular sovereignty had never been exercised and that both the legislature and its legislation were fraudulent. The result is that Donald is unable to understand the sense of outrage which overwhelmed Sumner and other Republicans when they were confronted with the Kansas facts and which led them to speak as they did during the debate. To him they were simply hysterical extremists and fanatics and the only way he can account for their attitudes, as in Sumner's case, is to attribute them to personal frustrations of various kinds. The result is neither biography nor history.

During the course of this critique, the concentration has been on the faults of Donald's book rather than on its virtues. This has been done because there has thus far been no really critical evaluation of the volume. Those who have reviewed it have accepted Donald's facts and interpretations and have been led by a certain surface reasonableness into believing it to be a judicious biography. This, joined to the fact that its pages are well-written, has resulted in the encomia which have greeted it and, remarkably, in its author's receipt of a Pulitzer award. That the book is well written is true. But it does not present the real Charles Sumner. One does not find in it the indefatigable scholar, the humanitarian willing to lay down his life for his fellow man regardless of color, the warm human being never too busy to help his friends or forgive his enemies, the orator and statesman who ranks with the founding fathers of American democracy.

*Loren P. Beth*

## Toward a Model Movie Censorship Law

THE DECISION of the United States Supreme Court in the *Times Film Case* and the opinion by Mr. Justice Clark betray a shocking lack of creative thought about the problem of censorship. The Court majority seems to have said to itself, "Obviously some movie censorship is necessary in order to prevent real obscenity from being depicted on the screen." This is an observation with which most people would agree. I do not happen to accept it; but I am willing to use it as a starting point for the present analysis. The Supreme Court, on the contrary, stopped its analysis at this point. If "some censorship" is necessary, said the Court, then we cannot question the censorship system that is being used. This is, clearly, a means of avoiding having to think about what is admittedly a difficult problem. In what follows, I make a tentative attempt to do what the Supreme Court majority completely, and the dissenters largely, failed to do: to look at censorship realistically, in the light of both the First Amendment and the nature of the movie business.

I take as my text a not-so-famous line from John Milton's very famous plea for an end to prior censorship, *Areopagitica*: "I deny not, but that it is of greatest concernment in the Church and Commonwealth, to have a vigilant eye how books demean themselves as well as men; and *thereafter* to confine, imprison, and to do sharpest justice on them as malefactors" (my italics). Bringing this up to date in terms of my topic, it says, "Certainly movies may be obscene; but the way to deal with this is by the same method we use for criminals: wait until there is a crime and then catch them and try them in a fair trial."

This method, of course, has its defects. One cannot predict who will commit a crime, nor when or where or how a crime will be committed; thus for the most part we have to *allow* crime and try to deal with it afterwards. There are few effective ways of *preventing* crime by

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application of law. And no one, I take it, would suggest that the police ought to have the power (which they nevertheless sometimes exercise late on dark nights) to stop people who are on legitimate business (or no business) simply because they *might* commit a crime. Yet this is exactly what most movie censorship has always done, and what the Supreme Court has now upheld. Every movie is, in Chicago, a suspected criminal, who must be stopped and searched before being allowed to proceed on his way. Justice Clark attempts to justify this by referring to a "test" of "capacity for evil." Such a test, however, cuts so broad a swath as to be all but omniscient. It is well known what a great capacity for evil exists in the soul of every human being. Is the moral that all our souls should be searched and certified before we can go through life?

Justice Clark further places great reliance in the fact that prior censorship is "the most effective fashion" in which the state can impose censorship. Even conceding the truth of this statement, it has seldom before risen to the dignity of a constitutional principle. On the contrary, it is the argument always used by government and police officials when they wish to violate some previously accepted right. Wire-tapping is an effective way to catch criminals; prior censorship is an effective way to police movies; and, I suppose, an inquisition is an effective way to uncover heretics. Clark proceeds to the enunciation of the principle that "it is not for this Court to limit the State in its selection of the remedy it deems most effective." This again is a radical, if not revolutionary, idea. All cases involving due process in which the Court has overruled a state have required just such a limitation on state procedures; in fact, most of the meaning of the due process clause is procedural, and without such limitation by the Court the Fourteenth Amendment would still be the nullity it was before 1923. It cannot be too often remembered that *all* invasions of liberty throughout recorded history have been justified as reasonable, effective, desirable, and necessary by those who wished to make them. Surely a judge on a court with the duty of judicial review is under an obligation to search for the answer as to whether these claims are real or specious.

Granted that prior censorship is effective (only too effective, some would say); and granted even that some censorship is necessary. Does it follow, however, that the system of prior censorship is the only method which could achieve the purpose? Is it really necessary to treat every picture as guilty until proved innocent? And isn't there much information to show that such a procedure is unjust to producers, exhibitors and

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the general public? These are the questions I hope to answer, but in reverse order.

The greatest and most obvious injustice in the prior censorship (or licensing) system is the fact that it assumes guilt before there is any reason to suppose a crime has even been committed. In the criminal law there are always two things necessary before a case can be brought to trial: proof of the perpetration of a crime, and evidence of guilt. The licensing system violates both rules.

Secondly, the licensing system is unfair because it does not allow a trial or even an administrative hearing on the main question involved: Is the movie, or a part of it, obscene? In view of the considerable difficulty of answering this question, and of the distinct possibility that personal narrowness, puritanical outlook, religious doctrine or simple prejudice will influence judgment, it is surely the more just course to hold hearings of some sort in which a movie can be defended. This is especially true since no legitimate movie producer will ever admit (nor, probably, ever believe) that his product is obscene. The minimal procedural change, which would go at least a little way toward justice, would be to treat censorship cases as cases in administrative law (administrative adjudicatory decisions of such a formal and important nature must ordinarily have an adversary hearing). So far as I am aware, no licensing system requires this and no censoring agency permits it. Even with such a change, the other injustices of prior censorship would remain.

A third injustice comes from the nature of the business of producing and distributing movies. Except for great hits, movies and exhibitors operate on a rather narrow profit margin. They cannot ordinarily afford the expensive court litigation which becomes necessary if they desire to contest an adverse licensing decision. The result is that most censorship is effective not because it is right but because few can afford to fight it. The principal legal element involved in this is the placement of the burden of proof. For whereas in a criminal trial the state must prove the guilt of the defendant, in censorship cases the defendant must prove his innocence. Not only is this very difficult to do, but it is opposed to the legal standards on which we have always prided ourselves. It makes producers and distributors reluctant to go to court, and by giving the censors all the advantages it encourages them to be narrow-minded and intolerant: for they feel there is little chance of being reversed.

Further, without hearings there is little chance that continuous and ascertainable standards will be used by censoring agencies. This lack

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puts the movie producer into the position where he often feels he must sanitize his product to the point of sterilization, since he does not know what any individual licensing body will do with the finished movie. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons for some of the more nonsensical provisions of the Production Code. Unfortunately, it is sometimes true that what offends no one also pleases no one; the vacuous or innocuous movie has little to offer a public which is more inclined to sit lazily at home in front of a smaller screen.

The censor argues that prior screening of films is necessary to protect the public. But it is significant that there is no such advance screening for any other method of communication. Plays, ballets, operas, television programs, books, magazines, comic books, newspapers—even burlesque shows and filthy postcards—all may be shown or distributed without the previous approval of a licensing board. It is difficult to argue that the potentiality for evil is much greater in the case of movies. If it is not, why is licensing needed only for them?

The example of the legitimate theater is instructive in this regard. The staged drama has many of the characteristics of the movie: it has voice and movement and, like the movie, it proceeds in an artificial atmosphere; the only significant difference might be that there is, on the stage, no way of having close-ups. This does not seem to be a significant enough difference to require a wholly separate kind of regulation. There is one other kind of distinction between the two which no one admits but which may well be in fact crucial: this is that movies have sought and sometimes gained a mass audience, while the theater has catered to small groups of the intellectual elite. Censorship of movies may owe some of its history to this distinction, for while the elite can—almost by definition—not be corrupted by what it sees (because it is incorruptible or because it is already depraved?)—the great masses of ordinary people are easily corrupted and special pains must be taken to keep them pure. So might go the argument; but it is an argument which is never made. It runs *sub silentio* beneath the whole idea of movie censorship as we have known it. It is my contention, however, that this is neither a valid nor a proper motive for film licensing.

If a play comes into question, it happens because one or more of its customers complains to the proper police authority. If the complaint is taken seriously, an official will be sent to see it. Provided this person regards the play as being so objectionable as to run afoul of the obscenity laws, he may order the play closed. The producer has the option of continuing the play at the risk of court prosecution, or of going to court

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himself with a claim that the obscenity law has been wrongfully applied. This system has worked well enough for many years. So far as I am aware, no member of any audience has ever been debauched or run right out and committed a criminal act—though many patrons may have been displeased. In short, the mere showing of the play, provided that there is an option of closing it down shortly if reason exists for such action, does not seem to harm the community at all. There seems to be no convincing reason why the same system could not be used for movies. In fact, the censor could attend the first showing of every movie in town and close it down immediately after that performance. This would avoid the complaint that pictures are treated as criminals before they are even shown.

There should be added to this a provision, however, that the burden of proof should be on the censor, and that this proof must be shown in court. In other words, movies should be handled as if they were defendants in criminal causes. Nothing is likely to reduce censorship to its proper proportions as quickly as the requirement that movies must be charged in court and convicted by actual evidence. Yet there is no reason why such a system would not be effective in preventing actual obscenity from appearing on our screens.

One comment should be added: there is a good deal of evidence that the nature of movies, and of movie audiences, is changing a great deal. More and more movies are serious, adult films (not always good ones, admittedly) which are intended for a serious, mature audience, and which appeal mostly to that kind of audience. The craving for the innocuous and the merely violent is now, happily for the dramatic quality of movies, largely satisfied by television. This is especially true of what used to be called "art movies", but which have become so common nowadays that no one thinks of labelling them any more. The audience for such productions has become somewhat like the audience for live drama—it is selective and intellectual. The blessing of this is that these movies are available in cities and towns which seldom see live drama. It would be a pity to spoil this encouraging development by the kind of censorship which Chicago thoughtlessly indulges.

## *S. Dorman*

### PASSAGE WITH ANCESTORS

Ghosts took me out in their long boats  
through frozen milk of frost, and air  
so thin it could not contain my breath.

I said to the ghosts as we went out:  
Here, in the palm of my hand I carry  
the blood of twelve kings, of holy prophets,  
and my marrow is deep with history.

The long ghosts in their boats of stone  
turned, with a mocking sound of breath:  
You storm of flesh in the ancient calm,

the time heaves in when your falling dust  
will take its place in our common realm.  
Those shapes of genesis blew thin as air  
and I and my blood returned alone.

### KID SISTER

In dungarees cracked tight,  
pony plait and flat shirt  
the little lemon hangs  
at the foot of the lamptree.  
It's all rind, and tart  
to the core. But time  
will tighten until the smart  
passes and all's more  
than merely the babble  
of astringent juices.

Gerard Braunthal

## European Socialism at the Crossroads

THE IMAGE HELD in this country of deep ideological schism between socialists and conservatives in western Europe needs to be altered drastically. Fewer European voters are presented with meaningful alternatives based on sharp differences in dogma and doctrine than ever before. Instead, they are faced increasingly with a replica of the tweedle-dee and tweedle-dum American party system in which personalities quite often tend to play a more important role than issues.

The shift reflects a temper of the times which is characterized in many European countries by a subtle "Americanization" process of emphasis on pragmatism and eclecticism. Conservative, liberal and socialist parties are casting off their *Weltanschauung* tenets and, to vie for power more effectively, are broadening their electoral appeal to more classes of society. An examination of the programs of leading European socialist parties in the postwar era tends to support this thesis. Before the war many were committed in theory to the Marxist concepts of revolution and class struggle, but in practice pursued a moderate, reformist policy. Now shedding these concepts, their emphasis on a democratic and social welfare state differs little from that of competing parties.

This significant change reflects the decreasing appeal of traditional Marxism in western Europe—Italy and France excepted. Explanations are not lacking: the achievement of many socialist goals to reform capitalism; the desire by the people for a materialistic, good society now rather than in the millennium; the identification of Marxism with the ideology of the Communist bloc; the dislike for radical experiments in a period of economic prosperity; and the shift in the social structure as the middle class increases in importance and the working class identifies itself with, or aspires to become, the middle class.

Thus, most socialist parties are impaled on the horns of a dilemma. If they become more conservative and pragmatic in nature, they will gain the support of a new "suburbia" vote, but at the expense of the hard-core traditionalist bloc which may secede to form a new radical party. Most socialist leaders view the first alternative as the only feasible

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one to increase the electoral standing of their parties and to gain governmental power, especially in countries such as Great Britain and the Federal Republic of Germany where their parties are beginning to be identified as the permanent opposition. The traditionalists, on the other hand, are dissatisfied with programs which may call merely for more social equality or a reform of the social insurance scheme. After all, they argue, conservatives are prone to demand, with less enthusiasm to be sure, similar reforms in order to maintain their popular appeal and electoral strength. Therefore a radical posture must be maintained. As we shall see in an examination of the most important socialist movements of Europe, the dilemma has been resolved generally by adopting the first alternative, but not without internal strain and stresses.

The Declaration of Basic Principles adopted in 1951 by the new Socialist International tends to serve as a model for the revisionists. Gone is the Marxist jargon found in prewar declarations. Included is a mixture of doctrine and short-range goals, such as an affirmation of democratic socialism, of a humanistic society, of public ownership of the key (not all) means of production, and an opposition to Soviet communism. In essence, this Declaration is broad enough to satisfy most wings in the socialist parties. Divergencies tend to appear when concrete programs have to be worked out and when domestic and foreign policies of national governments are at issue.

The evolution of the powerful Austrian socialist party (SPÖ) typifies this process toward moderation. Once a bulwark of Marxist dogma, it has participated since the War in a coalition government with the conservative People's party. This astonishing shift in policy may be explained to some extent by the prewar and war experiences of the population which desired a period of normalcy, and by the experiences under partial Soviet occupation. The result of this sharing of power has been an increasing moderation in outlook on the part of most socialist leaders, as reflected in a basic program (1958) closely patterned on that of the Socialist International. A radical minority, unsuccessful so far, has demanded an end to coalition politics with the "enemy," and a stress on Marxist philosophy.

In Italy and France a different pattern emerges. A tradition of revolutions, a gulf between dynamic and "immobiliste" forces, an existence of a multiparty system creating instability, a failure to meet important economic and social problems—all these have led to powerful communist movement and to divisions within the weaker socialist movements. In Italy all efforts have failed to heal a primarily doctrinaire schism between the Italian Socialist party (PSI) headed by Pietro Nenni

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and the Italian Social Democratic party (PSDI) of Giuseppe Saragat. The more powerful PSI, and the Communists of course, committed to a policy of Marxist radicalism, have received the support of the bulk of workers who are dissatisfied with many governmental policies; while the more moderate and weaker PSDI, echoing the principles of the Socialist International, and participating in coalition cabinets with the Christian Democrats, has the backing of primarily middle-class elements, such as white-collar groups, intellectuals and shopkeepers.

In France the Socialist party (SFIO) faces difficulties similar to those of its Italian ideological counterpart, the PSDI, except that its only major rival on the Left is the Communist party. The SFIO has been unable to make inroads into working class centers where the Communist party receives its sizable vote. Drawing strength primarily from non-industrial centers, the militant cadre of the SFIO has had to moderate its program. When, in addition, Guy Mollet, SFIO chairman, initially backed the conservative Fifth Republic régime of General de Gaulle, a minor secession in party ranks occurred, causing a further weakening of an already weak party.

At the root of the trouble facing the democratic socialist parties in Italy and France is the necessity, due to their inability to receive a majority of the vote in national elections, to share power and responsibility with non-socialist parties in coalition cabinets. Consequently, when a dash of their socialist program is blended with a large proportion of conservatism, the result is a further alienation of the radical vote. Marxism still exerts a magnetic appeal to the masses, not so much for its ideological content but for its message of protest against governments which fail to meet the economic challenge of the times in some sections of the two countries.

This is not the case in Scandinavia where the Social Democrats have been most successful in building model welfare states and creating a high standard of living. Under these circumstances left-wing radical forces have remained weak and conservative forces have been unable to make any significant headway in a challenge to the middle-of-the-road policies initiated by governments led by the Socialists. It is ironical that although the Scandinavians have produced no major socialist philosopher they have come closest to socialist goals in practice. Yet utopia is hard to achieve. Many economic and social problems still have to be met, and the gains of the past have to be consolidated.

On the other hand, in Great Britain, another home *par excellence* of the welfare state created largely by the postwar Labor government, the party now faces a major internal crisis. In Scandinavia, the socialist

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parties are tightly structured, strongly cohesive, and ably led. There the opposition parties cannot match them in these characteristics. But in Great Britain the Labor party encounters formidable challenges from its own ranks, its affiliated trade unions, and a popular Conservative party. No wonder that recent general elections have been lost by Labor and that its theoreticians have been engaged in a public slugging match to determine the direction in which the party shall move in the future, both in the foreign and domestic realms. Hugh Gaitskell, chairman of the party, and C. A. R. Crosland, theoretician, heading the right-wing, have called for close ties to the Western alliance system and moderation in economic reforms at home. These sentiments are not shared by the left-wing and key trade unions, which demonstrated surprising strength at the 1960 party conference. This bloc has called for unilateral nuclear disarmament and a policy of neutralism in foreign policy, and according to one of its chief spokesmen, R. H. S. Crossman, a re-esposal of Labor's original goals, including that of general nationalization. Morgan Phillips, secretary of the party, has attempted to restore internal unity by a programmatic bridging of the clashing points of view. He has advocated a combination of militant idealism and a program of action to solve Britain's immediate domestic issues, such as more public housing, less social stratification in education, and equal opportunities for all groups in society, but he has failed to mention the divisive issues of foreign policy. The future of the Labor party will remain dim unless these differences are resolved, and a program appealing to the general electorate, including the apolitical youth, is adopted.

The direction in which parties move is unpredictable. In the past the British socialists have been the moderate reformists whose Fabianism clashed with the continental Marxist philosophy. Today one wing of the British party stands for a program of action more radical in nature than that of the now reformist continental parties. There is no one explanation to account for this paradox; the cause lies in a combination of factors, as far as Britain is concerned: internal power struggles in the British party, the important status of the trade unions in party councils, and strong differences of opinion on ways of achieving power in the future and on the image the party should present to the nation.

To gain greater perspective, let us focus our attention on the Federal Republic of Germany. Unlike Britain's Labor party, the German Social Democratic party (SPD) in recent years has made the transition to a non-Marxist party in a most disciplined fashion. Characteristic of the change was the setting of the special congress held in 1959 at Bad Godesberg to adopt the new moderate program. Except for one lonely

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gold-embroidered red flag dating back to 1863, there was nothing of the customary sea of red bunting and red flags (the Communists have appropriated that symbol). A change of slogans also projected, in capsule form, the new look of the party. Plastered on billboards throughout the nation, the streamlined "Go with the times" poster implied to the populace that here was a party looking to the future unencumbered by ideological ballast. Whether the slogan will catch on remains to be seen, but suggestive of the change in accent was the simultaneous disappearance of the super-dimensional "Fight Atomic Death" banner on Bonn party headquarters.

Since the war most party chiefs had realized the necessity of updating the Marxist-tinged Heidelberg program of 1925. At the 1959 congress an overwhelming majority of delegates supported the new program, although the left-wing bloc was able to muster nearly 30 per cent of the delegate strength on a proposal to provide for a greater measure of nationalization. Short of leaving the party, this dissident bloc had no other choice but to accept reluctantly the rule of the majority. In fact, in local party elections since the congress, its power has been whittled down further. Nevertheless, among the bulk of older members and youthful "left-wingers" a yearning for the traditionalist, class-conscious party still exists.

The content of the new program should be spelled out since it reflects the position of most other socialist parties. In the section on economic affairs nationalization is no longer deemed the first principle of a socialist economy. It is rather one of several, and then only the last, means to establish public controls in order to counteract economic concentration and power. Would any Marxist program ever have stated: ". . . free employer initiative and free competition are important elements of a socialist economy," or "competition as much as possible—planning as much as necessary"? The party obviously has chosen a pragmatic course which neither emphasizes nor rejects nationalization, but which is likely to call for public ownership of coal and energy in its next electoral program.

In the section on religion there is an emphasis on tolerance, respect for religious institutions and communities, and cooperation with churches on the basis of a free partnership. Significantly, this is the first time that an SPD basic program treats this theme, once so controversial in its ranks. With only minor voices of dissent the party now has abandoned its aloofness toward organized religion, not merely because of opportunism but also from a sense of conviction.

In the section on defense the party at last commits itself firmly to

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the establishment of an army to uphold the democratic order. This is a far cry from the Weimar attitude of "hands-off" which helped to strengthen the conservative forces in the army.

At the 1960 party convention the SPD reaffirmed its basic program and supported a pro-west foreign policy orientation. While this is a significant rapprochement to the policies of the Chancellor's Christian Democratic Union, that party, in turn, is developing social policies which have proven attractive to the working class. Therefore, in the coming fall election the lack of important differences between the two major parties will result instead in a popularity contest between the 85-year-old Chancellor Adenauer, who will stand on the record of achievement of his administration in the last decade, and the 47-year-old Mayor Willy Brandt (SPD) of West Berlin, who will personify the courage of that beleaguered city. The SPD at last has recognized the necessity for a youthful and energetic candidate, but it faces a tough fight in a country booming with prosperity.

Socialist parties throughout Europe are re-examining their programs and goals, realizing that new policies must be hammered out to meet the challenge of the atomic age and the revolution of rising expectations. No longer can they hope to assume governing responsibilities by reaffirming the entire Marxist heritage. Their chances of success rather lie in adopting programs diffused with a realistic and idealistic spirit which will be attractive to the new generation. Obviously this task is not easy to achieve in an era which has lost much faith in ideologies and which has come close to realizing the original socialist goals. And yet democratic socialism should be able to achieve a breakthrough if within its philosophic framework it puts more weight on the unsolved problems of the European continent and the world at large. For instance, this could mean, as many socialists have indicated, an emphasis on the individual in mass society, in not alienating him from his job and in fully developing his personality; a call for a greater measure of social equality, and economic controls or deconcentration of industry not yet realized sufficiently in the welfare states; and a bold support not only for the developing nations in other continents but for supranational organizations in Europe and in the international arena. Such a program, perhaps a European counterpart to the "New Frontier," must have originality, style, and not be a carbon copy of a conservative program, if it is to generate enough interest and a sense of purpose among the rank and file, the supporters, and the uncommitted voters. Only then can the socialist movement, now finding itself at the crossroads and entertaining doubts in which direction to proceed, move forward in a higher gear.

# IN REVIEW

## THE NON-THEATRE OF BERTOLT BRECHT

Denis Johnston

DURING THE past decade a small but persistent underground movement in the English Departments has been spreading a theory abroad that Bertolt Brecht is not an actual person, but is an invention of Eric Bentley's. The fact that various plays attributed to this name have been produced from time to time has never quite exploded this balloon, for have we not also got the plays of Isaac Bickerstaff, another author who is almost certainly non-existent, notwithstanding the views to the contrary of many anthologies and reading lists? The theory has been nourished by the fact that for quite a long time *Mother Courage*—a play widely spoken of as Brecht's best—has not been available in any tangible form, except in one or two libraries where the cataloguing and cross-indexing are unusually good.

However, these doubts must now be laid to rest because of the appearance of this stout compendium of no less than seven plays,\* with a melancholy portrait of the dramatist himself on the dust wrapper, clearly showing that he was a man with a smile like a sibilant S, coffin-shaped ears, and with neither collar nor tie. These peculiarities of appearance may perhaps be attributed to the fact that, unlike Ibsen and the Ibsenites, Brecht died before the rise of the Brechteans. As Bentley states in his excellent introduction to the volume ("Homage to B.B.")—"In the past ten years, Bertolt Brecht has passed from the depths of unrecognition to the heights of a chic celebrity.... Brecht has died, and what we have chosen to inherit is a cult, an *ism*."

While hardly assenting to the application of the word "chic" to the B.B. that is here unveiled, it must be agreed that the plays, poison as they often may be to the box-office, are, at the moment, salvation to the college theatre. After having staged *My Three Angels* and *Picnic*, it is a common practice to save the situation by following up these romps with *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. Significant scraps from *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* are sometimes included in "Bills of Scenes" by well-instructed freshmen, and in general it may be said that there is here in these pages good provender for all types of educational playshop from Senior High to Harvard Loeb.

It is true, of course, that like Toller, Brecht is a Red, but we need not dwell on this fact any more than in the case of Shaw or O'Casey. If he is a new outcrop of Toller and the Expressionists, he is at any rate Toller in fancy dress. Like James Elroy Flecker, he places most of his plays in exotic

\* *Seven Plays by Bertolt Brecht*. Edited and with an Introduction by Eric Bentley (New York: Grove Press, 1961). \$8.50.

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settings and periods, where we may safely expect to be escorted down some Golden Road to Samarkand. But, unlike Flecker, he has usually got a didactic intention concealed as a poignard within the sleeve of his oriental kimono. Indeed one often finds oneself a little puzzled by the strange appearance of so much political *avant-gardism* amid the trappings of a nice old Musical. This apparent contradiction, as we will see, is deliberate on Brecht's part, and is bound up in his theory of the stage. So we had better be careful how we criticize it. It is no casual mixture of form.

To turn again to Mr. Bentley on the subject of the Brechteans, it is interesting to find them described as follows: "Speaking of the aggressions of the passive type of person, the works of Brecht embody aggressions of colossal proportions, and make a special appeal to persons who harbor such aggressions of their own." Later on, while leading up to B.B.'s distrust of the abstract ("Truth is concrete"), and to the importance, for example, of making cruelty appear real in the theatre rather than what is termed "stagey," he finally reaches this conclusion: "It is a theatre for sadists, masochists, sado-masochists, and all others with any slight tendency in these directions—certainly then, a theatre for everybody."

Mr. Bentley, as we see, does not hesitate to praise his man with faint damns, and now that we know where we are, let us glance through this generous block of 587 pages, and see how Brecht's taste for concrete truth, presented in the form of Lyrical Epics, is calculated to appeal to sado-masochistic, passive aggressors. This is a two-directional process that might, perhaps, be compared to the pursuit of that mythical bird, the Gobadan, which as every ornithologist knows, manages, while sitting on the fence, to foul both sides at the same time. In a few less technical words, this writer's work—whether we like it or not—represents a well-known contemporary phenomenon, comparable to the flight from musical music and from pictorial pictures. It is the flight from the theatrical theatre.

In Brecht's view, the present-day difficulty of existing in a world that is deeply committed to the virtues of non-existence is only a wider aspect of the dilemma of the dramatist who writes for what can only be described as Non-Theatre. Not Anti-Theatre, as Ionesco would have it. Brecht goes much further than this. In the world which he advocates, all dramatic values are suspect on principle, and an actor or an actress can commit no graver error of taste than to play tragedy tragically, or indeed, to play *Mother Courage* courageously. Were Brecht ignorant or unskilled in the arts of the stage we might laugh at these evident contradictions and ignore them. But Brecht knows precisely what he is attacking when he starts his assault on the magic of his own medium, and there is no escape from his continuous insistence that the stage has a cardboard front, and that we must not for a moment surrender to its illusion.

He persistently uses long passages of narration in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* not because he does not know that narration is a play-killer even more

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passé than the soliloquy. It is *because* of this fact that he uses them. Indeed, in *Mother Courage* he carries this practice one step further and, reviving a trick used by Toller that proved unpopular even in 1926, he projects his narration on lantern slides so that we have to read it for ourselves—surely the last word in anti-theatricality.

"Don't you like it here? [asks Yang Sun in *The Good Woman*.] The ceremony is only slightly postponed—because an important guest is expected at any moment. Also because the bride doesn't know what love is. While we are waiting, the bridegroom will sing a little song."

And so he proceeds to wreck the tempo with a four-verse "Song of St. Never-come's Day," to which Mrs. Yang's only significant comment is: "It looks like he's not coming."

Were this a play about Waiting—as is Samuel Beckett's best known work—one could appreciate the above as an experiment along the same lines. But it is not so. The *longeur* is introduced to remind us that we must not be allowed to relax into that bemused state where we forget where we are, and what we have paid for our probably uncomfortable seats. Unlike George Moore, who was once accused of leading his readers to the lavatory and locking them in, Brecht escorts his public to the gates of Thespis, and then slams these obstructions in its face.

The present volume presents us with our first over-all view of this process, which, after all, is no more *outré* in the theatre than in the Art Department. There is, however, one notable difference: while the contemporary artist will carefully paint his drips on to the canvas in order to give the impression of abstract artlessness, Brecht's deception takes the form of trying to make us believe that we are attending substantive performances about Galileo, about Joan, about the Thirty Years' War, about Kipling's "Soldiers Three" (now reinforced to four)—in short, about familiar dramatic material treated in a relaxed and rather old-fashioned way—while most of the time he is actually writing about a most unrelaxing and anti-social subject—the Death Wish, as Mr. Bentley very fairly points out.

The cumulative effect might be described in terms of the captain who hates the sea. Brecht hates the theatre. It has been alleged that a high proportion of leading *couturiers*, hating in their souls the opposite sex, give expression to this feeling by designing hats in which women will look ridiculous. The majority of The Sex, being more artful than we sometimes give them credit for, respond to this insidious attack not by screams or denunciations, but by wearing no hats at all. So, it may be argued, the mass of the theatre-loving public stay away from Brecht, not because he writes bad plays, but because he writes plays that are skillfully designed to destroy most of the elements that we go to the theatre to seek. Not so the academic theatre-goer who—

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hardened by years of School Shakespeare—knows how to stand up to a little punishment for the sake of the soul.

Unlike Pirandello, Brecht has on the whole been fortunate in his translators. Five of the seven plays in the present volume have had the sympathetic handling of Bentley himself—*In the Swamp*, *Mother Courage*, *A Man's a Man*, *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. The version of *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* is by Frank Jones, while the actor Charles Laughton is responsible for the adaptation of *Galileo*. *The Private Life of the Master Race* does not appear. Three of the plays—*Galileo*, *Courage* and *The Good Woman*—have had more than a literal translation. They have undergone a process of legitimate development, designed to make their nuances intelligible in another tongue, and not—as with so much of Giraudoux—with a misdirected intention of rendering them “commercial.” To the last, they all hold out against that.

### THE ENDURING ANTI-HEROIC

*Edwin Burr Pettet*

DENIS JOHNSTON does himself scant justice when in the Preface to this first collection of his plays\* he says: “I am a little puzzled as to whether there are any generalizations that can be applied to all six apart from the fact that they are all by the same author and that each in turn has been hailed as worse than the last.” Among other things, Johnston is an acute critic, one as able as the next man to tell what unites his work: a gallivanting pleasure in the anti-heroic, a roguish glee in unearthing dramatic material where most other dramatists could scarcely afford to find it—back of the battle in the side rooms of the struggle. That his findings in this unexplored dramatic country are revealed with engaging wit and endearing irony only the modesty of a practiced under-player would strive to conceal.

Where others hear a bang, Johnston has trained his ear to record a fizz, even apparently—and one suspects apparently only—when it is cocked to report the impact of his own dramatic prose. This refusal to hear what isn’t there separates him from the other romantics of the Irish stage. Yeats, Synge, O’Casey enlarged upon life as they enlarged upon themselves; Johnston likes life brought down to size—occasionally, perhaps, a little shorter. Like Otto Brahm, he distrusts the big scene. If he sees one coming, he disarms it with a muffled smile. Like Shaw, he is unimpressed by the glamorous—the parade uniform in which the fictitious dresses itself to pay homage to the truth.

The title play of the collection, *The Old Lady Says No*, is without doubt

\* *The Old Lady Says No and Other Plays* (Boston: Atlantic, Little, Brown & Company, 1960). \$7.50.

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the most difficult to read; surely, for a producer, the most heart-breaking to stage. To anyone not saturated in the ways of Dublin and the by-ways of Irish romance, it is by far the most elusive of meaning, for, not only has Johnston conceived a kind of Irish *Everyman*—which like any morality play assumes a common credo from which to become operative—he structured his fable as an Expressionist fantasy, a *Walpurgisnacht* of crossed symbols, interchangeable parts and mixed metaphors. On what may with caution be taken as the literal level of the play, the spirit of Robert Emmet, the “darlin’ of Erin,” wanders through a nightmare edition of contemporary Dublin in search of Sarah his beloved of the legend. It is a serviceable dramatic device and by no means an unusual one; but for a non-Irishman like myself, to whom the crashing sounds of Celtic myth and misery come as echoes only, it obscures more than it reveals. That the insides of Irish life and times, mores and habits are accorded a rough shaking in the teeth of Denis Johnston’s eloquent rhetoric is blunt enough to escape no one. What escapes me, and may the next man, is the point. There is a battle in progress, of that I am sure; whose side I am on, that I cannot tell. It is comforting, therefore, to read the author’s concession in his Preface: “It is true that the point of *The Old Lady* can be fully appreciated only in Dublin. . . .” When he adds “. . . where its meaning is only too evident to any ordinary intelligence” my already intemperate enthusiasm for the inhabitants of that extraordinary city flares even higher.

*The Scythe and the Sunset* (a title obviously travestyng O’Casey’s *The Plough and the Stars*) dramatizes—or more accurately un-dramatizes—the Rising during Easter Week. It is Johnston at his un-heroic best, though he says of it: “it shows every sign of turning out to be one of those elusive phenomena—a play without a public.” In the light of Irish theatrical history it is no wonder. O’Casey, when he took the flag of the I.R.A. into a pub, scandalized and angered the Dubliners. Johnston in this “anti-melodrama on what now has become a sacred subject” finishes the job. He takes the whole Rebellion into “an unpretentious restaurant, known as the Pillar Cafe,” where the glorious struggle for Irish freedom is reduced to the blood-thirstiness of a game of croquet, where the most violent weapon in evidence is a machine gun no Volunteer can assemble, and the only casualty a dislocated knee occasioned by the fall from a horse. Here Johnston fabricates a story not so much from recollection of incidents—although they are present too—as out of remembered temper, out of a recalled mood of un-heroics, or trivia, of battles without battle-cries, of a rebellion fought in passionate bewilderment but with strict attention as well to the exigencies of tea-time. In his Preface to *The Scythe and the Sunset* he says:

Consequently my recollections of the week are personal and undramatic. Of the rebels, I principally remember their charm, their civility, their doubts, and their fantastic misinformation about everything that was going on. Of the men in khaki there remains an impression of many cups of tea, of conversations about everything except the business in hand,

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and of a military incompetence of surprising proportions, even to my schoolboy's eye.

With the possible exception of *The Golden Cuckoo* (unaccountably not included in the present collection), *The Scythe* is to my mind the most hilarious of Johnston's comedies. Its humor of frustrated expectation is brilliantly managed; none of the characters behaves as we have come to expect conventional stage figures in a war play to behave. They may appear to be about to, but they don't. Thus the playwright forks us on one anti-climax after another—constantly reminding us thereby that in this rebellion at least the participants are very much the same people in the fight as they are out of it.

In *Strange Occurrence on Ireland's Eye*, Johnston has accommodated to a contemporary setting a well-known Irish murder trial of 1852. Originally designed as a radio play in 1936, it had no performance until, re-written as a stage version, it had its first showing in 1956 at the Abbey. It describes the conviction of an innocent man whose irrepressible ill nature on the stand solidifies into unquestionable fact the meagre circumstantial evidence on which he is being tried. The play turns on an interesting legal technicality whereby the prosecution is permitted to explore the character of the accused if once, by intent or error, the defense assails the character of any witness for the prosecution. What is revealed about Kirwan the moment he has forced down the legal bars (although of no bearing on the case at hand) spikes the jury's judgment and an unwarranted and prejudiced verdict is the result. In the end, Kirwan is saved, but by a *deus ex machina* so flagrant that one needs the author's explanation to make it palatable.

Writing of the actual trial of 1852 Johnston says in his Preface:

His sentence, of course, was commuted. Not even Kirwan's spectacular unpopularity could justify the Crown in hanging him on such evidence. But he was not released. The wretched man served the standard term of a life sentence on Spike Island, from which he emerged during the memory of some who are still alive, and ended his days in Australia. From this, it will be seen why it was necessary for me to soften down the plot of my play with generous injections of synthetic credibility—otherwise it would never be believed.

The most "generous injection" involves the alleged murder weapon. It appears to have been carried away from the scene of the alleged crime, hours before the established time of the alleged murder, in the golf bag of an innocent bystander.

The play is a serious one but never lacking in Johnstonian humorous irony. In addition, the author's early training for the bar gives the second-act trial scene the bite of truth that is a good deal pleasanter as dramatic excitement than the manipulated tensions usually peddled in theatrical court rooms.

The present volume holds three more plays: a humoresque in an airplane during the last war called *A Fourth for Bridge*; a play that has come from

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Johnston's scholarly work on Jonathan Swift, *The Dreaming Dust*; and the play that first drew me to Denis Johnston twenty-five years ago when I was a young director in Boston, *The Moon in the Yellow River*. At that time I thought it one of the finest modern pieces I had ever read and I am reluctant not to think so now. Perhaps I should speak of it from that early enthusiasm, remembering the thrill of romantic alignment that placed me alongside Blake to defend Irish purity against the intrusions of German materialism, the sweet pathos of Dobelle's discovery of love for his daughter, and the courageous clarity in Laningen's purpose when he ends the second act and Blake's life with a shot from his pistol. For on re-reading the play I experienced the sadness of disenchantment—more, I feel certain, with the old romantic mood which ran to meet the play half-way, than with the play itself. But suddenly the irrationality of the romantic struck me as tiresome. Blake's charming insouciance has lost its glamour; I can't feel quite sure that the German, Tausch, is really a villain with an infernal machine. After all, I am persuaded, a little electricity is in itself not a bad thing even for Ireland and even at the expense of having the plant manager a responsible citizen. Nor do revolutionary irresponsibility and world disillusionment, however cogent the political argument or psychologically justified the cause, excite my sympathetic understanding as once they did. And Dobelle's awakened love for his daughter: it still touches despite the hardening years—though I can see it now for what it is: a melodramatic conversion worthier of Richard Steele than Denis Johnston.

But let Romanticism fade as it will. Everyone's library will be a warmer place if he can reach for this volume in the saddening hours.

### A RIGOROUS SEMANTIC THEORY

J. W. Swanson

LAYMEN IN STUDIES of the philosophy of language can be excused for being perplexed by the word "semantics." This thoroughly ambiguous word has at least four meanings, two of them reputable and two suspect. First, of course, there is "semantics" as that (respectable) branch of the science of linguistics concerned with the meanings of words. This is a specialist's discipline. Secondly, there is that special off-shoot of modern logic that deals with the primitive relation of denotation in a purely formal fashion through the analysis of non-natural languages. This sort of semantics falls under the study of axiomatic systems, and is virtually a sub-discipline of modern mathematics. It thus goes without saying that this sort of semantics is reputable. Thirdly, there is the highly suspect use of "semantics" in Korzybski's pseudo-discipline of "general semantics." This is the use of "semantics" made enormously popular by Stuart Chase, S. I. Hayakawa and various contributors to the journal *Etc.* Although not devoid of occasional keen insights, general

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semantics hardly constitutes a serious scholarly discipline as do the first two mentioned. Fourthly, there is what I call the "sloppy" use of "semantics." This is embodied in the ubiquitous layman's use of the word to characterize any sort of linguistic ambiguity. It is often heard in the popular assertion: "This disagreement is only a question of semantics." But this is trivial, for in the loose sense of "semantics" generally intended, i.e., "having to do with words," *any* disagreement or argument is a question of semantics.

Ziff's analysis of meaning\* draws largely on the first sort of semantics described above. But it is apparently meant as a prelude to an analysis of the second type, for the author remarks that his "essay is best thought of as an informal introduction to and sketch of a rigorous semantic theory.... This will involve a detailed and formal specification of the elements of the theory, viz. its primitive terms, relations, and operations" (p. 198). Were this sequel accomplished, Ziff would have succeeded in bridging the gap between the now disparate disciplines of semantics as an analysis of natural languages and semantics as a purely formal analysis of symbolic non-natural languages. I doubt that he has succeeded.

Still, the book is of considerable value to serious students of the philosophy of language. Ziff belongs to that presently ultra-fashionable school of philosophical analysis descended from the later writings of the Austrian-English philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgensteinian philosophers are concerned with the analysis of philosophical problems in terms of ordinary language, and by and large contend that philosophical problems result from a technical warping of words and expressions, which have a perfectly good commonsense use in ordinary language, in such a manner that philosophical puzzles arise. In philosophical contexts language has "gone on holiday," to use a phrase of Wittgenstein's. The problems of philosophy, according to this view, are only pseudo-problems; they have no solutions, only dissolutions. And the dissolutions come about through showing (à la Wittgensteinian analysis) just where the departure from common sense came about. For example, although we have perfectly good examples ("paradigm cases," as these philosophers are wont to say) for the use of the word "see," as in "I see a chair," "I see you," etc., technical philosophers persist in arguing that I really cannot see the chair, I can only "see" my own sense data. The chair is a "logical construction" out of my sense data, a congeries of impressions etc. (This hoary problem goes back to Berkeley.) But this is an absurd departure from ordinary usage, the Wittgensteinians claim. What right has the philosopher to distort the meaning of a term that he has learned from perfectly clear cases in everyday use ("I see a chair.") This whole method of analysis is rather aptly

\* Paul Ziff, *Semantic Analysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960). \$5.00. In order to avoid confusion I have usually regularized Ziff's special punctuation (e.g., he uses periods within quote-enclosed examples in order to indicate "intonation contour" rather than syntactic relevance).

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summed up in Wittgenstein's oft-repeated maxim, "the meaning is the use."

Ziff combines this method of analysis with semantic analysis in the first (linguistic) sense. Assuming a morphological analysis—i.e., a sorting out of the individual minimal segments (morphemes) that have meaning—of the English language already to have been accomplished, he sets himself the task of determining to what extent this set of English morphemes can be said to have meaning in English according to certain philosophical criteria. The set of morphemes provided by the expert in linguistics does not necessarily coincide with the set of utterances that have meaning in English in terms of Ziff's analysis. For example, the first "to" in "I want to go to Istanbul" does not have meaning, according to Ziff, while the second "to" does have meaning. The propriety of the first "to" is to be judged solely on the basis of "syntactic regularities" in the language, that is, regularities such as, "adjectives generally precede nouns," "the' is never followed by 'that,'" etc. That the second "to" *does* have meaning is illustrated by the fact that it has contrasts. One could say "I want to go *through* Istanbul" or "by Istanbul," but one could *not* replace the first "to" without deviating from the syntactic regularities of English. The use of the first "to," then, is governed solely by conformity to certain "syntactic regularities," whereas the use of the second "to" is governed by conformity to certain "semantic regularities" as well. Meaning, in Ziff's philosophical sense, is to be analysed in terms of "semantic regularities."

But not all non-syntactic regularities are semantic regularities. An example of a semantic regularity would be the following: "If 'Hello' is uttered then generally one person is greeting one or more others" (p. 46). On the other hand, one could imagine a community in which there existed a taboo requiring members to utter "Hello" only if swine were present. This would be a regularity all right, such that if "Hello" were uttered then something is always the case (viz., swine are present); but it would not be a semantic regularity. Although Ziff does not characterize it as such, this would be a "pragmatic regularity," according to Morris's well-accepted division of semiotic into pragmatics, semantics and syntactics.

The problem then is to characterize meaning in terms of the sets of conditions ("state regularities") associated with certain utterances. Ziff attempts to do this by means of the notion of "distributive sets" for the elements of English. The distributive set for a morpheme of English would be the set of utterances in English in which the morpheme occurs (pp. 90-91). Thus the distributive set for "good" would include "this is good," "this is a good painting," "Good!" etc. Clearly the notion of "distributive set" is a sharpening up of the rather intuitive Wittgensteinian notions of "meaning as use," "meaning in context," etc. But Ziff feels the need to go further than this. For if he were to characterize meaning solely in terms of sets of conditions associated with distributive sets, then with respect to certain statements where the conditions were identical, one might be forced to say that

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two words have the same meaning when in point of fact they do not. The conditions associated with "the glass is exactly half full," for example, are identical with those associated with "the glass is exactly half empty." Yet "full" and "empty" certainly do not have the same meaning in English. For this and other reasons Ziff is led to introduce the notion of "contrastive set."

Thus if the element in question is the word "good," the first set [distributive] includes such utterances as "That is good," "What good is that?" "She is good to me," whereas the second set [contrastive] includes such utterances as "That is fine," "That is pleasant," "That is mine," "What use is that?" "What man is that?" "She is mean to me." (p. 147)

The contrastive set thus consists of all those utterances in which "good" could be replaced by some other word. Each of these sets (for any given word) will have certain sets of conditions associated with it, much as in the case for "Hello" given above. If we take the logical product<sup>1</sup> of (a) the set of conditions associated with respect to some word in some utterance (as with "lion" in "I want a lion") and (b) the complement of the set of conditions associated with a corresponding member of its contrastive set (e.g., "I want a tiger"), then we have analysed out the *difference* of the two sets of conditions. Now take the sum of these differences for a given element (the difference between "I captured a lion" and "I captured a tiger," "lion[s] are carnivores" and "tiger[s] are carnivores") and, subject to a few provisos that may be omitted here, you have the set of conditions in terms of which you can give the meaning of the word in question.<sup>2</sup>

Ziff caps his technical analysis of meaning in terms of "relevant difference" with this charming illustration:

Formulating the relevant differences between the distributive and contrastive sets for  $m_i$  in  $E$  is essentially a matter of providing some characterization of a set of conditions. . . . One procedure, particularly appropriate in connection with common nouns like "tiger" and "lion" may be called "paradigmatization." This can be described as follows. Imagine that your life and fortune depended on showing a bloody and irascible dictator an animal that was unmistakably a tiger. We may assume that the word "tiger" in the dictator's idiolect and the word

<sup>1</sup> The logical product of two sets consists simply of the elements which are members of both sets. The complement of a set consists of all of those elements which are *not* in the set.

<sup>2</sup> I am omitting the details of Ziff's analysis of "relevant differences." It is admirably done, but fairly technical. I believe the sense of it can be extracted for the general reader without recourse to the symbols Ziff uses.

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"tiger" in your idiolect have no difference in meaning whatever. If you show the dictator an animal such that it is not the case that it is unmistakably a tiger then you get whatever you don't like, whereas if you show him something that is unmistakably a tiger then whatever you like. In such a case, would you prefer to show him an  $x$  such that  $x$  is striped or not striped? four-legged or three-legged? whiskered or un-whiskered? purple or black or neither? one inch high or two feet high? tangible or intangible? and so on. In this way one can easily formulate a dictionary entry such as "tiger": a large carnivorous quadrupedal feline, tawny yellow in color with blackish transverse stripes, etc. (pp. 194-195)

The analysis of meaning (chapter V) constitutes the major theme of Ziff's book. The two chapters preparatory to it, in which the author constructs the necessary instruments for his analysis, contain criticisms of what Ziff feels to be two main distortions in most contemporary studies in the philosophy of language—the inordinate emphasis on reference and truth as the most important points of departure for the analysis of language. His point with regard to reference is simply that meaning cannot be explicated in terms of reference. This point, he remarks, is merely a reiteration of a view held both by Frege and Wittgenstein. Readers familiar with contemporary philosophical literature on the point will recall Frege's much cited example of "The Morning Star" and "The Evening Star," both of which have the same referent—viz., Venus—yet differ in meaning. What Ziff contributes in this connection is a good deal of exceedingly subtle illustration by way of examples. His criticism of the second pillar of formal semantics, the analysis of truth, rests on the same orientation as the first. Truth is just not as crucial to the understanding of a *natural* language as has been supposed. "There is no reason why the declarative utterance must be, as it were, the standard meter rod of a language." (p. 139)

The final chapter of the book, dealing with a detailed analysis of the word "good," is by far the most interesting. As Ziff notes in his preface, the final chapter was written first; indeed, it was written a few years before the rest of the book. The chapters preceding it were then written as a justification or explication of the method of analysis used in explaining the meaning of "good." Actually, however, one is rather hard put to see the connection between the last chapter and the preceding five. For in his final analysis of the meaning of "good," Ziff scarcely uses the elaborate machinery of distributive sets, contrastive sets, state regularities, etc. developed previously. Rather his method is merely typical of the Wittgensteinian mode of analysis. This being the case, it abounds in all the maddening affectations of that style of writing (or that methodology). The analysis proceeds by indirection, is infested with asides, provisos, parenthetical remarks of all kinds, rhetorical questions and literally hundreds of examples. Nevertheless, it is a brilliant piece of work.

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Ziff has a remarkable ear for language, perhaps the best since Empson. He unearths countless enormously subtle distinctions that one is compelled to accept once they have been pointed out. The total effect is dazzling, but it cannot be described; the book has to be read. Perhaps this sample will give the reader an idea of the sort of thing Ziff accomplishes—here, in a long aside:

(However the ordering of adjectives in the construction in question is not as simple a matter as it may at first appear. One says "He's an intelligent old man," but not "He's an old intelligent man," and yet "old" has a much greater privilege of occurrence than "intelligent." Again, one says "a pious young girl," but not "a young pious girl," and so on. Furthermore, it should be noted that one says "a fat old man," but "an old fat pig," whereas "a fat old pig" might be uttered in speaking abusively of a man. Consequently it seems that environments like "a . . . man," "a . . . girl," introduce some special factors. Thus some principle other than simple privilege of occurrence must be at work here. Semantically speaking, it appears to be one having something to do with natural kinds but I can provide no satisfactory syntactic characterization.) (pp. 205-206)

My chief criticism of the book is that it attempts to do what is in principle impossible. In the technical portions dealing with distributive sets, contrastive sets, sets of conditions, etc. (details of which have been omitted in this review), Ziff appears to be developing a formal theory of semantics (semantics in the second sense above), a theory which could be cast into the precise form of an axiomatic system. But throughout he undercuts this stated aim, it seems to me, by use of Wittgensteinian methods. I say he undercuts this aim because the two methods of analysis are fundamentally incompatible. This is not to say that both methods do not have something of value to contribute to the clarification of contemporary problems in the philosophy of language. It is rather that the whole tenor of Wittgensteinian analysis is antithetical to the rigorous formulations of the logician. The follower of Wittgenstein's method is virtually committed to a method of analysis that consists in playing by ear, whereas the logician has to follow the score wherever it might lead him.

Even so, whether the author achieves his intended aim or not, this book is a valuable contribution to the philosophy of language. It must be read carefully in order to be appreciated. And it should be read by serious students of the philosophy of language.

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